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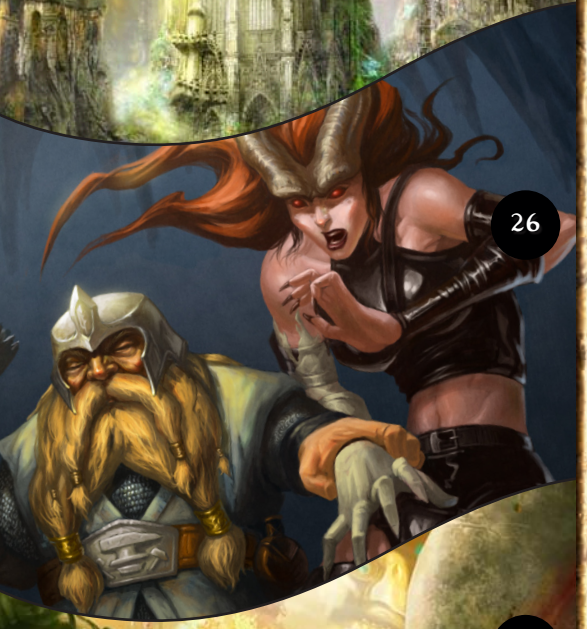

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366

DRAGON August 2008

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Musical Chairs

Holy crap, is it August already? Where does the time go? As Gen Con approaches, all sorts of games are afoot around the office, as usual. Most of RPG R&D will be at the show, including Bart, Chris, Stacy, and myself for *D&D Insider*. Feel free to swing by one of our seminars or the booth and say hi if you'll be in Indy.

But that's not the real topic this month. I recently had a chance to experience something unique—something I know many of you do frequently in games of your own. I swapped places with one of my players in the game I run.

See, I run a weekly game for a rowdy bunch of co-workers, and a couple weeks back, I rolled up a character of my own and swapped places with one of my players. The results? Much, much better than I expected.

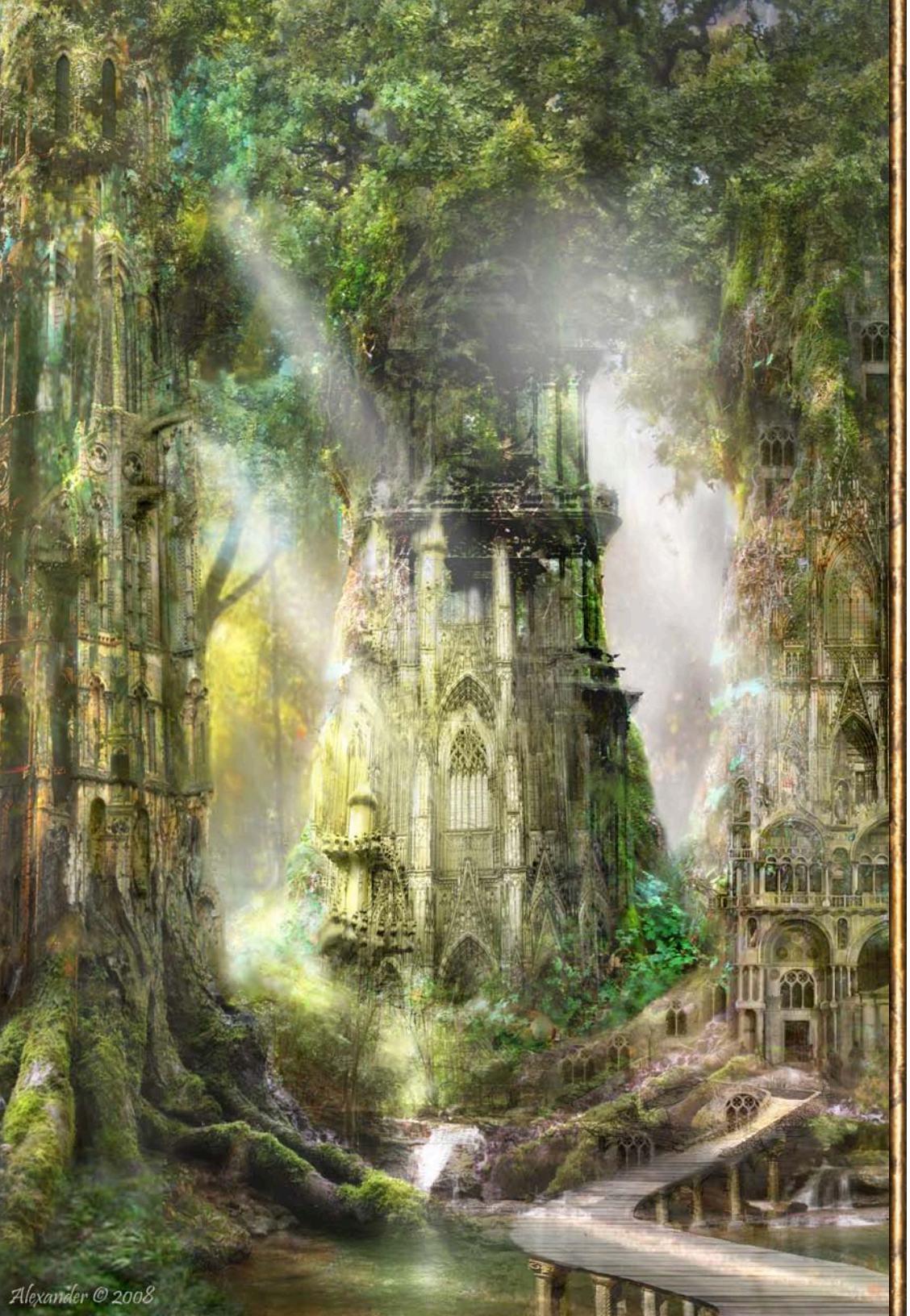
I don't have an adversarial relationship with my players. Far from it. We have a great time. They know it's their job to solve the puzzles and defeat the monsters I throw at them. And for the most part, they know it's my job to try and kill their characters. So we get along. But coming into this game—where I'm trading seats with one of my players—I was still a little nervous. I mean, one of my players can be a little, well, aggressive during a normal session. Maybe aggressive is the wrong word—let's say she sometimes seems to take the attacks of monsters personally.

"What will happen when I'm sitting elbow to elbow with these people?" I thought. "Will they accept me? Will they shun me? Will they tap some secret reserve of rage I'm unaware of and wrap a garrote around my character's neck at the first opportunity?" It turns out, my fears were completely unfounded. To my surprise, not only did they accept my addition to the group quickly and easily, they asked for another opportunity to swap seats so I could play with them another time.

What I learned is that when it comes to DM/player relationships, it doesn't matter where you sat last week. It matters only where you're sitting at the session happening right now. My aggro player? She had my back from start to finish. And she was playing a rogue, so a called shot to the groin would have been well within her character's reach. But she saved her sneak attacks for the monsters, and I saved my healing spells for her and the rest of the group—they kept my leader good and shielded, as any good group does.

The experience also gave me the opportunity to really learn a lot about the relationship dynamics in my group of players. And I feel like knowing how my players play, and why they make the choices they do, will only make me a better DM when I'm back behind the screen.

So if you haven't given this a try yet, consider swapping seats with your DM (or one of your players, if you're normally the DM) for a session or two. Run something short—one or two sessions max—and give the switch a try. You might find that the change of pace, the change of DMing styles, and the change from your normal routine make your experience in your normal role that much more rewarding.



Mithrendain, Citadel of the Feywild

by Rodney Thompson

illustrations by Anne Stokes and Rob Alexander

DEEP IN THE FEYWILD, beyond the swirling residuum storms of the Plains of Valdrennai, stands one of the most magnificent cities ever constructed by the eladrin: Mithrendain. The city's name is derived from the elf phrase "wall of the fortress," but the word has become synonymous with the beauty and longevity of the eladrin. Home to nearly 40,000 people, almost all of them eladrin, Mithrendain is a beautiful city resplendent with soaring towers and graceful architecture. In addition to its proper name, Mithrendain is often referred to as the Autumn City, since most of its towers are colored like autumn leaves, with yellow, gold, and bronze being common.

Mithrendain was founded several hundred years ago in the waning days of the eladrin empire. During a particularly brutal campaign against the forces of the fomorian kings, a contingent of eladrin soldiers discovered a place in the Feywild where the fomorians had carved a path from their deep kingdoms to the surface, creating a large hole that allowed thousands of vile beings to flow upward from the Underdark each day. After a bloody battle between the eladrin soldiers and the fomorians, the surface forces pushed their enemies back through the opening and into the Underdark once more. With the help of powerful wizards, the eladrin sealed the hole to the Underdark, shutting off one of the

fomorians' main avenues to the surface. Unwilling to trust that the massive opening would stay closed on its own, the soldiers founded a fortress on the spot, building the main citadel up around the barrier to guarantee that it could not be used to escape the Underdark without the eladrin being aware of it.

At first, the fortress stood vigilant over the barrier, with soldiers guarding the passage to make sure nothing would disturb it. Over time, secrecy surrounding the barrier (for the builders of Mithrendain did not want its existence to become common knowledge) caused knowledge of the true purpose of the fortress to fade from the minds of subsequent generations. Soldiers brought their families to live in the fortress with them, and children were born in Mithrendain with no knowledge of the barrier at the center of the citadel. Within a few decades, the small fortress was bursting with families, and these families built homes for themselves outside the walls of the fortress. With no attacks on the fortress, and no attempts by the denizens of the Underdark to shatter the barrier under Mithrendain, the fortress became a village, then a town, and within a few more decades the sprawl had become a city.

Years came and went, and the original generation of soldiers who founded the fortress moved on to the next life. As the centuries passed, the secret beneath the Citadel Arcanum (as the original fortress came to be called) was forgotten by all but a handful of city leaders, who then passed the secret knowledge of the barrier down to their successors. With no more threats from the Underdark (at least, no more than any other eladrin city), Mithrendain flourished and prospered. Eventually, the influence of soldiers waned and scholars, artists, and artisans became the new lords of the city. As the golden towers of Mithrendain grew ever taller, the militant history of the city faded into history.

In modern times, Mithrendain retains little that would suggest it was once a military outpost guarding the surface from encroaching forces of the Underdark. Soaring towers of burnished bronze and shining gold reach for the clouds, and the streets of the city are filled with eladrin who have no idea that at the heart of their city is one of the largest passageways into the Underdark in all the Feywild.

The City

Visitors to the Autumn City from the World are likely to be struck by both how beautiful and how alien the city is. Mithrendain is built in the middle of a great forest, seeming to spring up from the ground just like the trees throughout the city. In fact, many tall, broad trees are larger than several of the city's eladrin-built towers, giving the impression that the towers are merely natural growths within the forest. Unlike the Citadel at its heart, the city of Mithrendain has no walls, meaning that entering the city is a matter of walking wherever a gap can be found between the buildings and great trees. Hundreds of streets flow outward from the city center, allowing visitors to enter wherever is convenient upon arrival; similarly, leaving the city is a matter of finding the shortest route to the edge of the buildings. A city filled with citizens that can teleport, even over short distances, has little need for large walls to protect it.

The streets, loosely paved with an extremely smooth sandy yellow stone, wind their way through the city in a rather haphazard fashion. The buildings in Mithrendain are not built into city blocks, but rather cluster together in groups of three to five towers; the roads flow around them, and no dead-end streets exist in the city. Every street connects with another, or another branch of itself, and the buildings allows those looking in any direction to see for great distances with little obstruction. Though many buildings are in the city, each cluster of towers does not block line of sight over long stretches. While walking through the streets of the city, one might suspect that Mithrendain is an unplanned, haphazard city due to the organic nature of its layout, though this couldn't be further from the truth; the city's leaders carefully approve of every new building, making sure that it still leaves enough space for unobstructed views of distant places in the city. Additionally, the city has parks with small patches of grass and streams that feed into placid pool, which is where eladrin can gather outside their homes. The eladrin make sure that Mithrendain is constantly filled with gardens, streams, and small lakes, which gives the impression that the city and the forest surrounding it grew up at the same time.

Those who have not lived in the Autumn City for long notice a constant, low-pitched hum that permeates the entire city. Most eladrin living in the city no longer hear it; it is the thrum of arcane magic flowing through the city, interacting with its defenses and with magic on the inside (and outside) of every building in the city. The air pulses with unseen energy, but this is just a matter of course for the eladrin that live in Mithrendain. Another sign of the Feywild's magical influence is the *residuum* that collects on the buildings and streets of the city. The essence of magic, *residuum* coats much of the city like dust does in other settlements. The city's rulers pay to have the *residuum* collected and brought to the Citadel Arcanum, using it to reinforce the wards and magic sensors throughout the city. Unauthorized collecting and keeping *residuum* that has gathered on surfaces throughout the city is a crime, since this gathered *residuum* is absolutely vital not only to the maintenance of the wards around the city but also to reinforce the barrier over the tunnel into the Underdark found beneath the Citadel. Some greedy citizens have been known to keep *residuum* for themselves, but aside from being illegal, this

practice is also seen as a societal faux pas since it puts one's own personal gain over the safety of all Mithrendain.

Mithrendain is ruled by a council of seven respected members of the community. Each of the councilors is considered among the best in his or her field, and has earned the admiration of the rest of the city. The seven councilors also each hold a symbol of office; unknown to the inhabitants of the Autumn City, these symbols are also keys that can deactivate or destroy the seals on the barrier to the Underdark. When a member of the council dies, the other members of the council select a new councilor from the most deserving members of society, making sure to select a councilor that the people accept as a good choice. The councilors take great care in their choice, since each councilor must also hold a significant responsibility for the welfare of the barrier.

Walking through the streets of Mithrendain can be, for newcomers, like stepping into a timeless realm of alien design. There are no clocks, no sundials, and no other method of keeping time found anywhere throughout the Autumn City, and it can be easy to lose track of the time or even the date for those unaccustomed to this quirk. As a result of the organic layout of the city's streets and the lack of timekeeping, visitors to Mithrendain are often frustrated by both directions and descriptions of time given by the locals. "Meet me in the southeastern portion of the city, near the sculpture garden, sometime after midday," is a perfectly reasonable appointment for the inhabitants of Mithrendain, though the vagueness can sometimes confuse outsiders.

Like any other city, Mithrendain is broken down into a series of districts and zones. Most of these districts are identified solely by their directional relationship. Neighborhoods typically have names such as the "Southeastern" or "Below the North End," though a few exceptions exist. The Citadel Arcanum is the sole remaining structure of the original fortress that had been called Mithrendain, and the Old Battery is a darker side of town that represents some of the oldest homes and settlements in the city. Likewise, the Outskirts covers all the homes and villages outside Mithrendain proper, beyond which the light of civilization does not shine as brightly. Unlike most major cities, Mithrendain does not have a "Merchant District" or bazaar; rather, specialty shops serve customers throughout the city, usually on the bottom floors of the homes of individual citizens. Thanks to their longevity, eladrin learn more than one trade (and the basics of many more), and the need for specialization is less common. Most eladrin learn to make their own clothing, repair their own homes, and perform the basics of several other trades.

Defenses

Though Mithrendain might appear to be a harmonious place, the keepers of the eladrin city must be constantly vigilant for many dangers. The city was built above a massive passageway into the Underdark, and many of the city's defenses were put in place to warn of intrusion from below. However, threats from the Underdark are not the only things that worry the city's defenders; the Feywild full of mischievous and malicious creatures, many of which could do great harm to the city, also trouble them.

The primary defenders of Mithrendain are the members of the city guard. The city guard consists of volunteers who patrol the streets day and night, vigilant for the presence of anyone attempting to disturb the peace. Lurking in the shadows of Mithrendain are also the Watchers of the Night, a secret police force that is tasked with rooting out anyone, or anything, that might pose a threat to the safety of the city from outside. See the section on Law Enforcement below for more about each of these organizations.

As mentioned before, Mithrendain has no outer walls, and the buildings most distant from the Citadel Arcanum are without protection against anything coming from the forest. The inhabitants of these buildings take their defense into their own hands, though, and outlying buildings are full of surprises to ward off invaders from the outside. In many cases, those that dwell on the outskirts of Mithrendain keep a bow or a spear close to the door, and those that can afford it have magical wards placed on their homes. Buildings on the outskirts also have arrow slits carved out of the walls on the upper floors (at least, those sections of the building facing the edge of the city), allowing their owners to fire upon intruders from the relative safety of their homes. As one approaches the center of the city, the buildings have fewer defenses raised by their owners, and the city's own defenses become more prominent.

Mithrendain's two primary defense mechanisms come in the form of revelation spheres and tremor wards.

Revelation Spheres: Invented well after the city grew beyond the bounds of the original fortress, revelation spheres are solid marble spheres roughly 8 feet in diameter set into the indentations in the ground. Each revelation sphere is covered in glowing runes that pulse with arcane energy; these runes cause the spheres to give off waves of magical energy that disrupt illusions, including invisibility. In the Feywild, invisible threats pose extreme danger, since they could otherwise walk directly to the center of the city; given the number of creatures in the Feywild capable of turning invisible, it is no wonder the city's leaders ensured that revelation spheres were placed at intervals throughout the city, ensuring that their zones of influence overlapped to cover almost the entire city.

Revelation spheres take up an entire square as blocking terrain. Each revelation sphere radiates a continual 20-square close burst. Powers with the

Each revelation sphere is covered in glowing runes that pulse with arcane energy; cause the spheres to give off waves of magical energy that disrupt illusions, including invisibility.

illusion keyword can't be used within the burst and powers with the illusion keyword end upon entering the area of the burst.

Tremor Wards: Consisting of elaborate runes placed on enchanted stones set into the ground, tremor wards detect major disturbances in the ground that indicate a breach large enough to let enemies through.

A tremor ward takes up an entire square. Each tremor ward radiates a continual 20-square close burst that flows into the earth. Though these wards are attuned to ignore natural burrowing animals, they can detect any break in the ground large enough to let a Small creature pass through it. When a tremor ward detects a break in the ground, a path of runes leading from the Citadel Arcanum to the site of the breach glows brightly, allowing members of the city guard to follow the shortest path to the breach. The tremor wards can be deactivated by special request, such as when a new tower is to be built and ground needs to be broken, but most inhabitants of Mithrendain know better than to go digging within the reach of the tremor wards.

The Citadel Arcanum

Where the original fortress of Mithrendain once stood is now the towering Citadel Arcanum. After the population of the fortress began to grow beyond its capacity, major sections of the original fortress were torn down, rebuilt, torn down again, and rebuilt to better accommodate the fledgling city's expansion. At the point when Mithrendain could no longer be referred to as a town, the leaders of the city organized a massive reconstruction effort for the original fortress. The entire original fortress was rebuilt around a single, looming tower that stands above all other buildings in Mithrendain. This tower is the central structure of the Citadel Arcanum, and it serves as the central building of government and defense in Mithrendain.

The Citadel's design was influenced by human architecture, which at the time was deemed worthy of study due to the human propensity for defending their cities against invasion. However, the eladrin builders took inspiration from human designs and used their own techniques to produce a magnificent structure unrivaled in its beauty. Despite its artistic appearance, the Citadel Arcanum is extremely functional as a defensible structure. Walls surround the main grounds of the Citadel (clearly a sign of human influence), and the tower is guarded at all times, inside and out.

The Citadel Arcanum not only serves as the first and last line of defense of the barrier to the Underdark, it also is the central meeting place for the city's ruling council. Within the citadels are the offices and (in some cases) living quarters of the seven council members, and the Citadel also serves as a barracks and gathering place for the city guard. Moreover, the Citadel Arcanum serves as a base of operations for the city's secret police force, known as the Watchers of the Night.

The interior of the Citadel is well appointed, and even the most utilitarian parts of the Citadel have some amount of decoration and beauty to them. The Citadel also has a number of meeting chambers, training areas, and even a banquet hall. The Citadel Arcanum is the one building in the city that resembles the castles and keeps built by humans, though eladrin consider the Citadel far superior to any human creation.

The Mithrendain Barrier

At the center of the Citadel Arcanum rests the barrier over the opening into the Underdark, known only to those privileged few as the Mithrendain Barrier. The barrier's existence is a secret, though the most powerful members of Mithrendain society know of its existence. The barrier lies at the heart of the Citadel in a vast chamber where only members of the city's ruling council and their guests can go.

Highly trained elite guards, known as barrier sentinels, guard the barrier's chamber from threats from without as well as from within the area. Barrier sentinels must remain ever vigilant for the possibility of a breach in the barrier, though none have come thus far.

Barrier Sentinel Level 9 Elite Soldier
Medium fey humanoid, eladrin **XP 800**

Initiative +11 **Senses** Perception +12; low-light vision
HP 196; **Bloodied** 98
AC 27; **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 21
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6
Action Points 1

⊕ **Longsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+16 vs. AC; 1d8 + 7 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the barrier sentinel's next turn.

† **Drive Back** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Weapon**
+16 vs. AC; 2d8 + 7 damage, and push the target 3 squares.

† **Shield Riposte** (immediate interrupt, when hit by a melee attack; at-will)
Requires shield; +14 vs. Fortitude; 1d6 + 5 damage, and barrier sentinel gains a +2 bonus to AC and Reflex until the end of its next turn.

Fey Step (move, encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**
The barrier sentinel can teleport 5 squares.

Sentinel Step (immediate reaction, when an enemy moves into a position flanking the barrier sentinel; encounter)
The barrier sentinel can teleport 5 squares.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven
Skills Arcana +7, History +7, Perception +12
Str 16 (+7) **Dex** 20 (+9) **Wis** 16 (+7)
Con 18 (+8) **Int** 12 (+5) **Cha** 11 (+4)
Equipment chainmail, heavy shield, longsword

The resting place of the Mithrendain Barrier is a tall, cylindrical chamber with a ceiling roughly 50 feet tall. The barrier is a thick stone slab about 130 feet in diameter, set into the ground and carved with elaborate runes around the rim and stretching into its center. Thick, crimson curtains cover the walls of the chamber and elaborate torch sconces and a fine hanging chandelier light the room. Though such accoutrements might seem out of place above a barrier to the Underdark, the city's ruling council uses the chamber for its meetings, and each of the seven council members has a small throne that permanently rests within the barrier chamber.

The Seven Seal Chambers

The Mithrendain Barrier is far more than an enchanted slab of stone; it is in fact a magical barrier that prevents denizens of the Underdark from breaking through into the Citadel. The barrier is maintained and reinforced by seven magical seals, each one found somewhere in the Citadel Arcanum. These seals are magic circles carved into 10-foot-wide stretches of the Citadel's floor. Each seal provides a different kind of magical protection to the Mithrendain Barrier, and each seal rests within its own chamber. These seven seals are the key to protecting Mithrendain from below, and only when these seals are broken can the barrier be destroyed. Like the barrier chamber, each of the seal chambers is guarded by barrier sentinels at all times.

The Catacombs

Much to the chagrin of the Citadel's guards, the constant rebuilding of the Citadel Arcanum over the centuries has resulted in a number of secret passages both within and below the massive structure. Known collectively as the catacombs, the barrier sentinel corps has discovered over twenty secret passages leading from rooms within the Citadel into a warren of underground tunnels below the Citadel. Though none of these tunnels come anywhere close to the passageway to the Underdark, much of the catacombs is a subterranean maze.

Despite efforts to close or collapse these secret passages, passageways into the catacombs yet remain. Several Lords Marshal of the Watchers of the Night have used the catacombs as secret meeting places, fearing the eyes and ears of evil within the Citadel. Some of the secret passages merely lead to other rooms within the Citadel (a disconcerting fact that explains why most of the councilors prefer to sleep in their own estates), while others descend into secret structures that can reach several hundred feet into the ground. Beneath the Citadel Arcanum lie enough secret chambers and tunnels that barrier sentinels refer to it as the underground city, and it is a constant struggle to keep these passageways sealed. The darkest rumors hold that more passages have been forgotten over the years, just waiting to be rediscovered, and that the full extent of the catacombs stretches out beneath the entire city of Mithrendain.

Using the Citadel Arcanum

The Citadel Arcanum is an excellent setting for adventures set in Mithrendain. The Citadel is heavily guarded, but adventurers could spend days or weeks exploring the catacombs and the secret passages leading into and out of the Citadel. The catacombs are large enough to house multiple dungeon complexes, and the Citadel can act as a stand in for nearly any large castle or keep.

The Old Battery

Just to the northwest of the Citadel Arcanum is the section of Mithrendain referred to as the Old Battery. The oldest part of Mithrendain, the Old Battery is the first section of the city founded when the population of the original fortress outgrew itself. Named for a line of towers that once stood in its place, the Old Battery is as close as the city of Mithrendain gets to a bad part of town. As the oldest section of the city besides the Citadel, many of the towers of the Old Battery are older than any living eladrin in the

city. Though most are kept in fair repair, few of the inhabitants of the Old Battery are what one would consider "wealthy."

The Old Battery has a somewhat notorious reputation primarily due to the fact that many of its inhabitants are the families of exiles. Being exiled from Mithrendain is a severe punishment not only for the offender but also for the offender's family; having a family member exiled is like having a black mark placed on your family's reputation. Most such families are forced to move to the Old Battery by societal pressure, and while some suffer the disgrace in silence just as many more bear a grudge either against their exiled family member or against those who decided to send the relative into exile.

The Old Battery is full of history, but that history is overshadowed by its reputation. Although most inhabitants of Mithrendain would hesitate to call this section of the city "dangerous," many would agree that an unwise person enters the Old Battery alone. Criminals and outcasts flock to the Old Battery, and many would look to take advantage of unwary visitors. Inhabitants of the Old Battery are usually normal people just trying to get by, but there is no doubt that the section of Mithrendain is a breeding ground for dissent and chaos.

The Outskirts

Several settlements exist outside the city proper. Scattered out for several miles in every direction, these small towns and farming communities are collectively known as the outskirts. Most of the food for the city is brought in from farms in the outskirts. Like Mithrendain, the farms of the outskirts are somewhat unconventional in their methods and appearance. Most of the farms appear to be little more than homes built at random in the deep forest. Farmers in the outskirts take extra care in the planting of certain trees, and their ground-grown crops appear to sprout up at random throughout the forest. The authority of the city guard rarely stretches to the outskirts, though the small towns in the area have seen the occasional Watcher in the Night.

Farmers from the outskirts harvest their crops year-round and in careful rotation. Every few weeks, an eladrin farmer brings a portion of his or her harvest to the city to sell to city-dwellers. The carts of these farmers dot the street corners throughout Mithrendain at all times, and inhabitants of Mithrendain have favorite farmers that they prefer to buy from whenever possible.

Architecture

No city better exemplifies eladrin architecture than Mithrendain. Taking a look at the various buildings throughout the city, it becomes easy to feel like you are walking through a place built by beings with a different outlook on the world. Buildings in Mithrendain expand vertically; there are no sprawling estates in the city, and when more space is needed the owner of a building adds on another floor. Most buildings in Mithrendain are at least 30 feet tall, and almost all of them are circular towers with doors on the ground floor and stairs spiraling upward around the walls on the inside of the building. Eladrin buildings almost never have windows on the ground floor; it is too easy for an eladrin to teleport, and eladrin value their privacy. On the upper floors, well out of the range of a *fey step*, buildings have windows that are made of reflective glass, allowing those on the inside to see out but keeping those on the outside from seeing into the room. Wealthy eladrin pay to have disc-shaped platforms enchanted to hover near buildings they own, allowing an eladrin to *fey step* out of the upper floors of a building directly onto a platform and then descend to the ground by stairs without having to leave through their own front door.

Eladrin keep their private chambers on the upper floors of their building, leaving a large, open common area on the ground floors. Eladrin homes do not have bedrooms, but instead have cozy, soundproof meditation chambers where the eladrin spend their resting time. Proper meditation is extremely valuable to the eladrin of Mithrendain, and maintaining a small but plush meditation room is a matter of pride for most eladrin. Unfortunately, this means that inns in Mithrendain often have no bedrooms; those few that do (designed to cater to outsiders) have bedrooms constructed with a uniquely eladrin viewpoint. Normally, these bedrooms are small rooms with one bed and little room for anything else.

The common areas of eladrin homes are lined with bookshelves, since reading is highly valued in Mithrendain society. Eladrin store their valuables in small, underground vaults, accessed by secret doors. These vaults exist to keep others from teleporting into the vault, and the vault floors are lined with thick metal and stone to prevent anything from breaking into the building from below.

Laws and Enforcement

The Autumn City has a code of laws similar to that found in most civilized areas. Theft, murder, and trespassing are all just as illegal in Mithrendain as they are elsewhere. However, what distinguishes Mithrendain from other cities is the code of punishments that accompanies its laws. Imprisonment is not an option for punishment in eladrin cities, since keeping an eladrin prisoner is extremely difficult. Though many of the guard stations throughout the city have small holding areas for detaining a prisoner temporarily, no real prisons exist in Mithrendain.

If a crime calls for punishment beyond simple restitution, that punishment comes in the form of disfigurement. For some crimes, a symbol is branded on the offender's face, not only to rob the offenders of a clean appearance but also to warn others that he or she is a criminal. In more severe cases, crimes call for one of the offender's hands to be maimed beyond use, or sometimes twisted with magic to uselessness. The most extreme form of punishment, at least to the inhabitants of the Autumn City, is exile. When an offender is banished from Mithrendain, it signifies his or her complete removal from eladrin society. The exile and family are forever shamed, and the offender is forbidden from ever entering Mithrendain again. Many bitter exiles have fled into the Underdark, and some exiles make their treason complete by serving as agents of the fomorian kings there.

The City Guard

The Mithrendain city guards are the primary keepers of the peace in the Autumn City. Unlike in human cities, the guards in Mithrendain are mostly lightly armored, nimble sword-wielders who rely on their speed and dexterity to take down their opponents. They wear armor made of small overlapping plates, larger than scales but offering the flexibility and mobility of most leather armors. The city guard is headquartered in the Citadel Arcanum, but smaller guard posts exist throughout the Autumn City, which allows the guard to react quickly to any disturbance. The city guard is made up of paid volunteers, most of whom are young people without families of their own. City guards serve for as long as they wish, though there is little upward mobility in the Guard. Promising members of the city guard are given the chance to train as barrier sentinels in the Citadel Arcanum, but few have the skill and experience to make the jump to the elite corps of defenders.

Mithrendain Guard Level 2 Soldier
Medium fey humanoid, eladrin **XP 125**

Initiative +6 **Senses** Perception +8; low-light vision
HP 38; **Bloodied** 19
AC 18; **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 14
Speed 6

⨺ **Longsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+9 vs. AC; 1d8 + 2 damage.

⨺ **Protective Swing** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞) ✦ **Weapon**
+9 vs. AC; 2d8 + 5 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the Mithrendain guard's next turn.

Fey Step (move, encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**
The Mithrendain guard can teleport 5 squares.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven
Skills Arcana +4, History +4

Str 11 (+1)	**Dex** 17 (+4)	**Wis** 14 (+3)
Con 14 (+3)	**Int** 12 (+2)	**Cha** 10 (+1)

Equipment scale armor, longsword

Mithrendain Guard Captain Level 5 Soldier (Leader)
Medium fey humanoid, eladrin **XP 200**

Initiative +8 **Senses** Perception +10; low-light vision
Eladrin Courage aura 5; eladrin allies within the aura that succeed on a saving throw gain 5 temporary hit points.
HP 63; **Bloodied** 31
AC 21; **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 17
Speed 6

⨺ **Longsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+12 vs. AC; 1d8 + 3 damage.

⨺ **Protective Swing** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞) ✦ **Weapon**
+12 vs. AC; 3d8 + 5 damage and the target is marked until the end of the Mithrendain guard captain's next turn.

✧ **Guard Captain's Poise** (minor, at-will)
Close burst 10; target one eladrin ally within burst; target makes an immediate saving throw against one effect.

Fey Step (move, encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**
The Mithrendain guard captain can teleport 5 squares.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven
Skills Arcana +5, History +5

Str 12 (+3)	**Dex** 18 (+6)	**Wis** 16 (+5)
Con 15 (+4)	**Int** 13 (+3)	**Cha** 13 (+3)

Equipment scale armor, longsword

The Watchers of the Night

The Watchers of the Night are a secret police force within Mithrendain responsible for keeping a wary eye out for anyone or anything endangering the city. Originally established as a group of spies designed to root out anyone within the Citadel Arcanum that sought to destroy or bypass the barrier, the Watchers of the Night slowly expanded their jurisdiction to cover the entire city and the surrounding outskirts. Despite their humble origins, the Watchers have become an influential organization in the Autumn City.

The Watchers of the night are a secret police force in that they search out traitors to the city in secret. Each Watcher is given a signet ring that allows him or her to ignore the city's defenses. Watchers of the Night can turn invisible and use illusion spells as normal, even within the range of the revelation spheres, and as a result they spend their time watching the day-to-day activities of citizens throughout Mithrendain. The Watchers are mostly unobtrusive, but many feel uncomfortable with the secret observation of the Watchers. In fact, the Watchers' own name has something of a double meaning; on the one hand, they are vigilant against threats from the eternal night of the Underdark, but by the same token they are observers that peer at the people of Mithrendain from the shadows.

The Watchers are rarely seen, and few people in Mithrendain have ever encountered one; those that do usually keep quiet about the fact as well. Though no Watcher has ever revealed how he or she became a Watcher of the Dark, many suspect that the Watchers are culled from the ranks of exceptionally talented criminals who know how to move about the Autumn City unseen. Watchers wear leather armor that has been dyed to pitch black, and they carry ornate daggers given to them when their training is complete.

Watcher of the Night Level 12 Elite Lurker
Medium fey humanoid, eladrin **XP 1,400**

Initiative +16 **Senses** Perception +15; low-light vision
HP 194; **Bloodied** 97
AC 28; **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 26
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6
Action Points 1

Dagger (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+17 vs. AC; 3d4 + 5 damage

Arcane Blade (standard action; encounter) ✦ **Weapon; Cold, Fire, Lightning, or Thunder**
+15 vs. Reflex; 4d4 + 10 damage; the Watcher of the Night can choose to do normal damage with this attack, or have the attack deal cold, fire, lightning, or thunder damage instead.

No More Secrets (minor; encounter)
Close burst 10; target one creature; target gains 10 vulnerability to cold, fire, lightning, or thunder (Watcher of the Night's choice) until the end of the Watcher's next turn.

Fey Step (move, encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**
The Watcher of the Night can teleport 5 squares.

Watcher's Signet (minor; encounter)
The Watcher of the Night gains a +5 bonus to Stealth checks until the end of its next turn.

Night's Embrace (immediate reaction, when hit or missed by a melee attack; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Illusion**
The Watcher of the Night gains total concealment from the attacking creature until the end of its next turn. The Watcher of the Night can use this power even in the radius of a revelation sphere and this power does not end when the Watcher of the Night enters the radius of a revelation sphere.

Combat Advantage
A Watcher of the Night deals an extra 2d6 damage against any target it has combat advantage against.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven
Skills Arcana +10, History +10, Stealth +17

Str 14 (+8)	**Dex** 22 (+12)	**Wis** 19 (+10)
Con 19 (+10)	**Int** 14 (+8)	**Cha** 13 (+7)

Equipment leather armor, dagger, watcher's signet

Citizens and Denizens

Mithrendain is populated almost entirely by eladrin, and most of the inhabitants are happy to keep it that way. Mithrendain's population is mostly peaceful, and society moves at its own pace. The denizens of the Autumn City take their time with everything, and they rarely are in any kind of hurry. To the long-lived eladrin, each day can be taken at one's own pace. Two eladrin might agree to meet "after lunch," which could mean that their meeting is any time from right after lunch to just at sunset. Since most artisans work from their homes, there are no business hours; if the artisan is in, the shop is open for business. Everything takes place at a casual pace, which can be frustrating to outsiders. Many a visitor has commissioned an eladrin-made sword, only to find that the blacksmith's definition of "soon" and his own are different. As a result, inhabitants of Mithrendain see outsiders as too tightly wound, and prefer not to deal with the exasperating, impatient visitors.

Outsiders visiting Mithrendain might find themselves taken aback by aspects of the Autumn City's society. The eladrin inhabitants frequently consider outsiders to be novelties or curiosities. In a society obsessed with beauty, a race that doesn't share their smooth aesthetics is practically hideous, and many eladrin cannot help but gawk at visitors from the World. The eladrin of Mithrendain operate on their own schedules and yet seem obsessed with maintaining the beauty of their society and their city, two aspects that can combine to frustrate visitors to the Autumn City who need something from one or more of its inhabitants.

Notable Inhabitants

The following notable inhabitants of Mithrendain are suitable for use in any D&D campaign.

Lord Marshal of the Watchers of the Night

The commanding officer of the Watchers of the Night is a slender eladrin male named Amon Bassiri. Though little is known of his past (the same goes for all the Watchers), Amon holds the rank of Lord Marshal. He not only commands the Watchers but is also a member of the city's ruling council. Unlike other city rules, Amon lives in his apartments in the Citadel Arcanum, and it is said that he spends his nights exploring the secret passages beneath the Citadel—and keeping the secrets he finds from the city guard. Amon is a wiry male with ever-moving eyes, long black hair and pale skin; though he puts on an air of friendliness, his smile is oily and one could sense that the Lord Marshal is weighing every word being spoken carefully for any hint of treason.

Vyndra Sysvani

Another prominent member of the city's ruling council, Vyndra Sysvani is a female eladrin diplomat who has reputedly spent more time outside the Feywild than any other inhabitant of Mithrendain. Vyndra made a name for herself as a liaison between Mithrendain and the human cities outside the Feywild. After years abroad, Vyndra moved back to Mithrendain to serve on the city's ruling council, but she is still extremely knowledgeable about the world and its inhabitants. Vyndra is friendly to outsiders, and eager to hear news of the places she once visited. She can be a valuable ally to anyone visiting Mithrendain, especially given the way humans, dwarves, and many other races are treated in the Autumn City. Vyndra is an eladrin female in her later years whose beauty has not been diminished with the years. She wears her long blonde hair tied back at the nape of her neck, and she is extremely diplomatic even in the most troubling situations.

Amon Bassiri Level 17 Elite Lurker (Leader)
Medium fey humanoid, eladrin **XP 3,200**

Initiative +19 **Senses** Perception +18; low-light vision
HP 246; **Bloodied** 123
AC 34; **Fortitude** 29, **Reflex** 32, **Will** 30
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6
Action Points 1

Dagger (standard; at-will)
+22 vs. AC; 4d4 + 6 damage.

Arcane Blade (standard action; encounter) ✦ **Weapon; Cold, Fire, Lightning, or Thunder**
+20 vs. Reflex; 6d4 + 10 damage; Amon Bassiri can choose to do normal damage with this attack, or have the attack deal cold, fire, lightning, or thunder damage instead.

Rush to Action (standard action; ⚄ ⁞⁞) ✦ **Weapon**
+22 vs. AC; 4d4 + 17 damage; Amon Bassiri can shift 2 squares both before and after making this attack.

No More Secrets (minor; encounter)
Close burst 10; target one creature; target gains 10 vulnerability to cold, fire, lightning, or thunder (Amon's choice) until the end of Amon's next turn.

Fey Step (move, encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**
Amon Bassiri can teleport 5 squares.

Swift Watcher (minor 1/round; at-will)
One eladrin ally within 5 squares of Amon (and in line of sight) can shift 2 squares as a free action.

Watcher's Signet (minor; encounter)
Amon Bassiri gains a +5 bonus to Stealth checks until the end of his next turn.

Night's Embrace (immediate reaction, when hit or missed by a melee attack; recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞) ✦ **Illusion**
Amon Bassiri gains total concealment from the attacking creature until the end of its next turn. Amon can use this power even in the radius of a revelation sphere and this power does not end when Amon enters the radius of a revelation sphere.

Combat Advantage
Amon Bassiri deals an extra 3d6 damage against any target he has combat advantage against.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven
Skills Arcana +13, Bluff +15, History +13, Stealth +20, Thievery +20
Str 20 (+13) **Dex** 24 (+15) **Wis** 21 (+13)
Con 15 (+10) **Int** 16 (+11) **Cha** 14 (+10)
Equipment leather armor, dagger, Watcher's signet

Vyndra Sysvani Level 8 Elite Artillery
Medium fey humanoid, eladrin **XP 800**

Initiative +7 **Senses** Perception +8; low-light vision
HP 139; **Bloodied** 69
AC 22; **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 23
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6
Action Points 1

Dagger (standard; at-will)
+13 vs. AC; 2d4 + 4 damage

Reactive Blast (immediate interrupt, when targeted by a melee attack; at-will) ✦ Arcane, Fire
Close blast 3; +12 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 4 fire damage.

Fire Burst (standard; encounter) ✦ **Fire**
Area burst 2 within 20 squares; +12 vs. Reflex; 3d6 + 4 fire damage.

Bloodied Burst (free, when first bloodied; ⁞⁞) ✦ **Fire**
Vyndra Sysvani's *fire burst* recharges and she can use it immediately as free action.

Fey Step (move, encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**
Vyndra Sysvani can teleport 5 squares.

Alignment Good **Languages** Common, Draconic, Dwarven, Elven
Skills Arcana +15, Diplomacy +14, History +15
Str 11 (+4) **Dex** 16 (+7) **Wis** 19 (+8)
Con 14 (+6) **Int** 18 (+8) **Cha** 20 (+9)
Equipment fine clothes, dagger

Kagen the Blackknife

A truly odd sight in Mithrendain, Kagen the Blackknife is a drow innkeeper that runs one of the only genuine outsider-friendly inns in Mithrendain, a place called the Waystop in the Old Battery. Kagen is well-known throughout the entire city as a smiling drow who tells some of the wildest stories. Though many eladrin regard him as an oddity—a drow that is not a bloodthirsty killer—few truly know him well enough to make much of a judgment. Kagen's nickname, the Blackknife, comes from one of his incredible tales about a dagger he once owned that had a pitch-black blade that crumbled to ash when he came up to the surface. Few believe Kagen's tales, and most see them as little more than fanciful stories designed to entertain his patrons and keep them in the inn for a little while longer. Despite his friendly exterior, Kagen keeps all his patrons at arm's length at all times. He might seem friendly, but no one really knows about his past, and Kagen would like to keep it that way.

Kagen the Blackknife Level 6 Elite Skirmisher
Medium fey humanoid, drow XP 500

Initiative +9 **Senses** Perception +5; darkvision
HP 138; **Bloodied** 69
AC 20; **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 18
Speed 6

Short Sword (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+11 vs. AC; 1d6 + 6 damage.

Hand Crossbow (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 10/20; +11 vs. AC; 1d6 + 6 damage.

Clear the Bar (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 10/20; Kagen the Blackknife makes two hand crossbow attacks.

Deal with the Rabble (immediate reaction, when missed by a melee attack; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Kagen the Blackknife can shift up to 2 squares and make a *hand crossbow* attack.

Cloud of Darkness (minor; encounter)
Close burst 1; this power creates a cloud of darkness that remains in place until the end of Kagen the Blackknife's next turn. This cloud blocks line of sight for all creatures except Kagen the Blackknife. Any creature entirely within the cloud (except Kagen the Blackknife) is blinded until it exits.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven
Skills Bluff +9, Intimidate +11, Stealth +14
Str 16 (+6) **Dex** 19 (+7) **Wis** 15 (+5)
Con 13 (+4) **Int** 11 (+3) **Cha** 12 (+4)
Equipment short sword, hand crossbow

Heroes of Mithrendain

The following section includes new mechanics for player characters related to Mithrendain. Although a character need not be from Mithrendain to take or use any of these mechanics, the DM might wish to restrict the availability of powers or magic items to those who originate, or have at least visited, the Autumn City.

Fighter Powers

The following new powers belong to the fighter class and can be taken any time a character would normally take a power of that level provided he or she meets the power's prerequisites. These particular powers are available to all fighters, but eladrin fighters commonly take these powers (and powers like them) to take advantage of their inherent Dexterity bonus.

Hesitation Slash Fighter Attack 3
You flick your weapon one way, then the next, slashing your opponent and making it unclear from which direction your next attack will come.
Encounter ✦ Martial, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Strength vs. AC
Weapon: If you're wielding a light blade, heavy blade, or a spear, you gain a bonus to the attack roll equal to your Dexterity modifier.
Hit: 2[W] + Strength modifier damage, and the target grants you combat advantage until the end of your next turn.

Nimble Bladestorm Fighter Attack 5
Your weapon becomes a whirlwind around you, striking so fast that your enemies have little chance to dodge.
Daily ✦ Martial, Weapon
Standard Action **Close** burst 1
Target: All enemies in burst
Attack: Strength vs. AC
Weapon: If you're wielding a light blade heavy blade, or a spear, you gain a bonus to the attack roll equal to your Dexterity modifier.
Hit: 2[W] + Strength modifier damage.

Blades from All Angles Fighter Attack 13
Your weapon appears to come from all angles at once, making escape impossible.
Encounter ✦ Martial, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Strength vs. AC
Hit: 3[W] + Strength modifier damage, and the target is knocked prone.
Weapon: If you're wielding a light blade heavy blade, or a spear, you gain a bonus to the damage roll equal to your Dexterity modifier.

Unerring Blow — Fighter Attack 15

You position your attack such that your enemy has no chance to avoid it.

Daily ✦ Martial, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Strength vs. Reflex
Weapon: If you're wielding a light blade heavy blade, or a spear, you gain a bonus to the attack roll equal to your Dexterity modifier.
Hit: 3[W] + Strength modifier damage.
Miss: Half damage.

Maneuvering Assault — Fighter Attack 23

Your weapon flashes quickly, letting you move your opponent exactly where you want it as it tries to dodge your attacks.

Encounter ✦ Martial, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Strength vs. AC
Weapon: If you're wielding a light blade heavy blade, or a spear, you gain a bonus to the attack roll equal to your Dexterity modifier.
Hit: 3[W] + Strength modifier damage and slide the target a number of squares equal to your Dexterity modifier (minimum 1 square); the target is immobilized until the end of your next turn.

Pinpoint Cyclone — Fighter Attack 25

Your weapon strikes nearby enemies with uncanny precision, inciting chaos while attacking with order.

Daily ✦ Martial, Weapon
Standard Action **Close** burst 1
Target: All enemies in burst
Attack: Strength vs. Reflex
Weapon: If you're wielding a light blade heavy blade, or a spear, you gain a bonus to the attack roll equal to your Dexterity modifier.
Hit: 3[W] + Strength modifier damage.
Effect: Target grants you combat advantage (save ends).

Wizard Powers

The following new powers belong to the wizard class, and they can be taken any time a character would normally take a power of that level provided he or she meets the power's prerequisites.

Arcane Insight — Wizard Utility 2

You call upon the knowledge of your ancient ancestors, summoning the collective arcane wisdom of millennia of eladrin history.

Encounter ✦ Arcane
Free Action **Personal**
Prerequisites: You must be trained in Arcana
Trigger: You make an Arcana check and dislike the result.
Effect: Roll an additional Arcana check, keeping the better of the two results. You decide to make this extra roll before the DM announces the result.

Feywild Spell Surge — Wizard Utility 10

You reach into the Feywild, drawing forth a torrent of the plane's inherent arcane energy to fuel your spells.

Daily ✦ Arcane
Free Action **Personal**
Trigger: You miss at least one attack with a power that has the Arcane keyword.
Effect: Reroll one of the missed attack rolls. Use the second roll, even if it is lower.
Special: If you are an eladrin, you gain a +2 bonus to the rerolled attack.

Shunt Between Worlds — Wizard Attack 15

You blast your foes with the same arcane energy you use to pass between worlds, shunting them into the Feywild and back again.

Daily ✦ Arcane, Implement, Psychic, Teleportation
Standard Action **Close** burst 2
Target: All enemies within the area of the burst
Attack: Intelligence vs. Will
Hit: 4d6 + Intelligence modifier psychic damage and you teleport the target 5 squares in any direction. The final teleport destination must be on solid ground.
Miss: Half damage and no teleport.

New Paragon Tier Feats

Any feat in the following section is available to a character of 11rh level or higher who meets the prerequisites.

Fey Step Trailblazer [Eladrin]

Prerequisite: Eladrin
Benefit: When you use your *fey step* power, you can also teleport one adjacent willing creature that is either your size or smaller with you at the same time. When you arrive at your destination, place the creature that traveled with you in any square adjacent to you.

Reactive Fey Step [Eladrin]

Prerequisite: Eladrin
Benefit: When you are the target of a push, pull, slide, or other form of forced movement, you can use your *fey step* power as an immediate interrupt. You negate the forced movement, but you do not teleport.

Paragon Path: Watcher of the Night

"You have no secrets from me."

Prerequisite: Eladrin, rogue class

You know the secrets that people try to keep behind closed doors. With the threat of the Underdark lurking behind every corner, your vigilance is all that stands between a peaceful life for your people and their total annihilation.

Watcher of the Night Path Features

Watcher of the Night's Action (11th level): When you spend an action point to take an extra action, you also gain a +5 power bonus to Stealth

and Perception checks (including passive Perception checks) until the end of your next turn.

Against the Shadows (11th level): You ignore concealment when attacking adjacent creatures.

Shadowslayer (16th level): While you have concealment or total concealment and your target grants you combat advantage, you can apply your sneak attack damage to your opportunity attacks, even if you have applied your sneak attack damage that round already.

Watcher of the Night Exploits

Arcane Blade Watcher of the Night Attack 11

You snatch arcane power from the Feywild, wreathing your dagger in energy.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Martial, Weapon; Cold, Fire, Lightning, or Thunder
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Requirement: You must be wielding a light blade.
Target: One creature
Attack: Dexterity vs. Reflex
Hit: 3[W] + Dexterity modifier damage.
Special: Each time you make an attack with this weapon, you can choose to have this weapon deal normal damage, or damage of one of the following types: cold, fire, lightning, or thunder.

No More Secrets Watcher of the Night Utility 12

You find the weak point in an enemy's defenses and exploit it.

Daily ✦ Martial
Minor Action **Close** burst 10
Target: One enemy in burst
Effect: Target gains vulnerability 10 to cold, fire, lightning, or thunder (your choice) until the end of your next turn.

Glaring Wound Watcher of the Night Attack 20

Your blade cuts deep, leaving a gaping wound that others can see and pound on as well.

Daily ✦ Martial, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** or **Ranged** weapon
Requirement: You must be wielding a crossbow, a light blade, or a sling.
Target: One creature
Attack: Dexterity vs. Reflex
Hit: 3[W] + Dexterity modifier damage, and the target is slowed and takes ongoing 10 damage (save ends both).
Miss: Half damage and no ongoing damage.
Effect: The target gains vulnerability 10 to attacks with the weapon keyword (save ends).

New Magic Items

The following new magic items either originate in Mithrendain or are commonly found in the possession of the city's residents. Some of these items might find their way out of the Feywild in the hands of exiled eladrin, and they can also serve as unique rewards for quests undertaken and completed in the Autumn City.

Mithrendain Steel Weapon Level 8+

This weapon was forged deep in the Feywild and is infused with the plane's inherent arcane energy.

Lvl 8	+2	3,400 gp	Lvl 23	+5	425,000 gp
Lvl 13	+3	17,000 gp	Lvl 28	+6	2,125,000 gp
Lvl 18	+4	85,000 gp			

Weapon: Heavy blade, light blade
Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d6 damage per plus
Property: Add 1 square to the distance of any teleport you make.
Power (Daily ✦ Teleport): Free Action. Use this power when you hit with this weapon. You teleport the target 2 squares in any direction.

Eldritch Serpent Armor Level 4+

The slender, overlapping scales of this armor are taken from magical serpents native to the Feywild.

Lvl 4	+1	840 gp	Lvl 19	+4	105,000 gp
Lvl 9	+2	4,200 gp	Lvl 24	+5	525,000 gp
Lvl 14	+3	21,000 gp	Lvl 29	+6	2,625,000 gp

Armor: Scale
Enhancement: AC
Property: Unlike most scale armor, eldritch serpent armor has no speed penalty.
Power (Daily): Minor Action. Until the end of your turn, you gain a bonus to damage rolls equal to this armor's enhancement bonus on attacks with the arcane keyword.

Shield of the Barrier Sentinels Level 9+

This ornate shield is awarded to members of the Barrier Sentinels as a reward for bravery.

Lvl 9 4,200 gp Lvl 29 2,625,000 gp
Lvl 19 105,000 gp
Item Slot: Arms
Property: You gain a +1 bonus to AC and Reflex while you are flanked.
Level 19: +2 bonus to AC and Reflex.
Level 29: +3 bonus to AC and Reflex.

Watcher's Signet Level 11

This white gold ring takes the shape of a dagger that curls around the wearer's finger—the dagger being the closest thing the Watchers have to an official symbol.

Item Slot: Ring 9,000 gp
Property: You can use powers with illusion keyword within the radius of a revelation sphere, and your illusion power duration does not end when you enter the radius of a revelation sphere.
Power (Encounter ✦ Illusion): Minor Action. Gain a +5 power bonus to Stealth checks until the end of your next turn.

About the Author

Rodney Thompson is a game designer at Wizards of the Coast, Inc. His previous design credits include the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* Saga Edition, the *Starships of the Galaxy* supplement, and the *Knights of the Old Republic Campaign Guide* supplement.

Wish Upon a Star

by Bruce R. Cordell
illustrations by Rob Alexander, Chris Seaman, and John Stanko

WARLOCKS SOMETIMES seize arcane power by swearing pacts to questionable entities beyond the world. Such shortcuts are sometimes judged foolhardy by lore-wise wizards who spend years studying their way to mastery.

Naysayers are especially suspicious of a warlock sworn to the star pact, which connects its follower to what many believe are simple stars, though others describe them as horrific monsters. Do star pact warlocks swear their oaths to simple stars or to unfathomable entities of the Far Realm. Or are these oaths given to a terrible combination of the two? For that matter, what is a "simple star" if it is more than a distant prick of light in a larger shroud of darkness? Not even star pact warlocks know for certain, but this dearth of understanding doesn't deter them from wielding the power bequeathed from the pitiless points of light that shine unchanging beyond night's void.

When you wish upon a star, sometimes horrifying dreams follow.

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Star Pact

Those with a passing knowledge of the lights speckling the night sky can point out constellations and the names of interesting or distant stars. However, those who swear the warlock star pact eventually discover new truths about what they might have earlier mistaken for mundane stars. Such devout scholars learn the secret names for common stars, and indeed, they discover constellations of alien lamps too far away for most eyes to discern unaided.

Star pact warlocks scour foes with icy banes and mouth curses given them in dreams born beyond the night sky and—though few enough admit the possibility—perhaps from the Far Realm. How is it that warlocks gain their connection to this aberrant, unknowable region outside time by way of the stars?

The truth might be that some stars have come under the influence of Far Realm entities. Such creatures use stars (some without conscious thought, but others with intention aforethought) as windows on the world. Warlocks draw influence from these creatures through the star for which each is named.

It seems unlikely that every star in the sky is associated with a mind-shattering monster (though some star pact warlocks wake from nightmares where every light in the night sky simultaneously blinks open, revealing eyes . . .). But few stars are definitely so associated, and these connections are scribed in a spidery, shaking hand on a parchment titled *Revelations of Melech*.

Revelations of Melech

The scroll called *Revelations of Melech* is wound inside a narrow obsidian cylinder whose exterior is scribed with strange star constellations. The protective obsidian cylinder acts as a *rod of harvest*.

The following names and associated qualities are scribed on the manuscript inside the cylinder.

Acamar: Acamar is a corpse star whose motions and behemoth size send celestial objects that draw too close spiraling to their doom.

Caiphon: This purple star is usually on the horizon. It has the guise of a helpful guide star, but sometimes betrays those who rely upon it.

Delban: An ice-white star often visible only during winter, Delban might surprise the star-gazer with an impromptu flare during any season.

Gibbeth: Better not to write or think overlong on this greenish point in the sky.

Hadar: Hadar is the extinguished cinder of a star lurking within the cloaking nebula of Ihbar.

Ihbar: A dark nebula between stars, Ihbar is slowly expanding and eating the light of neighboring constellations.

Khirad: A piercing blue star, Khirad's radiance sometimes reveals secrets and gruesome insights.

Nihal: Nihal is a reddish star that writhes around the position it should hold in the heavens.

Ulban: Ulban's blue-white light disrupts cognition and the ability to recognize danger.

Zhudun: Another corpse star, Zhudun is historically described as shining a baleful light over the Ruined Realm of Cendriane in the Feywild before its fall.

Playing a Star Pact Warlock

If the worst fears of naysayers somehow prove true, what does it mean if you draw your arcane power from the Far Realm and other horrors of the cosmos?

Egotistic

"The stars don't influence me; if anything, I influence them!"

You could be a star pact warlock with an immense ego. Sure, you've learned aberrant creatures are associated with the innocent-seeming stars. Yes, strange visions of maddening landscapes have begun to infiltrate your nights. Granted, you sometimes hear strange atonal music when no one else can. But it's all manageable. You know you are up to the task of retaining hold of your sanity. You know the signs to watch. Too much star-gazing. Too much talking to yourself. Too much fantasizing about what Gibbeth *really* looks like despite the warnings in that dusty old tome not to dwell overmuch, even in thought, on this enigmatic entity. A lesser mind could falter and crack under the truths to which you are privy and under the strains of temptation you forego. But you are master of your own mind. You are confident that you can make use of the power the stars grant without falling victim to the madness that lurks behind their radiant light.

Naïve

"Oh, you're quite the jester! I think I would have noticed if a great eye opened in the moon and blinked when I performed the ritual!"

You might play a star pact warlock who is merely naïve. Perhaps you are too fresh from the swearing of your pacts to have noticed anything particularly aberrant in the power that begins to flow into your

hands. If strange dreams sometimes trouble your rest, what of it? Who hasn't had a nightmare or two, especially after a day spent rousting undead and other monsters from their lairs? The stars are distant points of light with strange names, and if invoking their names transfers powers, why worry overmuch about the source of that power? True, some of your spells have horrific-sounding names and frightening effects, but then, are not many wizard spells hardly less ominous? Isn't it true spell names and flashy magical effects are meant to impress foes? Unless and until a pseudopod bursts from an unexpected wall or ritual book and pulls you shrieking into the earth, you're happy to retain your view of reality.

Mad

"Get away from me! I said, get away! Oh. Sorry. I thought I saw . . . well, nevermind."

Perhaps you really have begun to lose your reason. Feelings that started out merely as mild discomfort grew into avid dislike, and finally graduated to fits of rabid fear; you know that when you react so strongly merely to the sight of, say, fish, something is probably not quite right in your head. But despite this realization, you forge ahead. You can fake it well enough to get by, despite some episodes of screaming into your bedroll at night. Your friends might suspect that your sleep is disturbed by your red eyes, but how will they ever know you dreamed last night of red stars? Crimson points swirling and flocking through the skies like birds, alternately merging together and breaking apart in a hideous dance that slowly but surely traced the outline of a tear in space. A hole in the very air through which an amorphous mass lurked, a shape composed of countless tiny worms who, from tiny putrid mouths, called out your name. Your friends won't know of course. But sometimes they ask you to stop laughing, because you're starting to act like a crazy person.

Utilitarian

The stars are just a road to power—same as any other. The pact has its risks, sure, but by my lights, seeking wisdom among the stars is better than believing a devil's lies, or plucking out your eye to use a crazy artifact."

You might be a star pact warlock who believes it's all so much hype. You know full well there could be eventual repercussions for learning too much—possibly even eventual madness could resist. But no one said the life of an adventurer was easy. You might be up to holding onto your sanity, or you might not, but you're not naïve about the shocking true nature of night's gaudy coat of stars. Your ego isn't so overweening that you are certain you can avoid doing the bidding of an aberrant monstrosity, but heroes of previous ages, whether they swore pacts or not, have always risked the same. No, you know the risks and accept them in return for all the potent spells you gain in return. You accept with open arms what these alien entities can teach you, knowing that you can turn the spells to your own ends. You're not stupid, so you don't willingly risk the lives of your acquaintances if a strange dream urges you to, or if one of your spells tries to squirm out of your control.

Prophecy of Deimos

"The world doesn't end with water, fire, or cold. I've divined the coming apocalypse. It ends with tentacles!"

Warlock Feats

Warlocks can choose from the following new feats. These feats are not necessarily meant only for star pact warlocks.

Heroic Tier

Any feat in the following section is available to a warlock character who meets the prerequisites.

Sacrifice to Caiphon [Warlock]

Prerequisites: Con 13, warlock

Benefit: When you attack with an encounter power that has targets and you miss all targets, then you can deal damage to yourself equal to the level of the power. If you do, you immediately recover the power.

Starfire Womb [Warlock]

Prerequisites: Cha 13, warlock

Benefit: When you deal damage with a power that has the radiant or fear keyword, immediately roll a saving throw to relieve a condition of your choice from which you are suffering.

Shadow's Eclipse [Warlock]

Prerequisites: Int 13, warlock

Benefit: While you have concealment, you also have radiant resistance 5 + one-half your level.

Paragon Tier

Any feat in the following section is available to a warlock character of 11th or higher level who meets the prerequisites.

Twofold Pact

Prerequisites: 11th level, Eldritch Pact class feature

Benefit: You gain a second Eldritch Pact. You gain the at-will spell and pact boon of both pacts. You can use only one of your pact boon benefits at a time, however.

Bael Turath Born

Prerequisites: 11th level, tiefling, warlock

Benefit: Your fire resistance improves; you now have resist fire 8 + your level.

Epic Tier

The following feat is available to a warlock character of 21st or higher level who meets the prerequisites.

Student of the Athanaeum

Prerequisites: 21st level, Int 15, warlock

Benefit: Once per day when you use a daily power, you regain the use of that daily power at the end of the encounter.

Warlock Powers

Warlocks can choose from the following new powers.

Level 1 Encounter Spells

Glow of Ulban Warlock (Star) Attack 1

You call upon Ulban, whose blue-white light pierces the mind and interrupts the instinct for self-preservation in those caught in its otherworldly glow.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Implement, Radiant
Standard Action **Ranged** 5
Target: One creature
Attack: Charisma vs. Will
Hit: 2d8 + Charisma modifier radiant damage.
Star Pact: If this attack hits, the target takes a –2 penalty to its next saving throw. This penalty to saving throws lasts until the end of combat.

Level 1 Daily Spells

Prophecy of Zhudun Warlock (Star) Attack 1

You whisper snatches of prophecy glimpsed in the blank face of dead Zhudun. A vision flashes into your foe's mind that is so horrifying that it loses track of its surroundings.

Daily ✦ Arcane, Fear, Implement, Psychic
Standard Action **Ranged** 10
Target: One creature
Attack: Charisma vs. Will
Hit: 2d8 + Charisma modifier psychic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends). The target treats all its enemies as if they are concealed until it saves from its dazed condition.
Miss: Half damage, and the target is not dazed.

Crown of Stars Warlock (Star) Attack 1

Flaring points of star-bright light encircle your head. With each gesture, a painful point of blue-white light leaps away in a halo of choking smoke toward one foe.

Daily ✦ Arcane, Implement, Radiant
Standard Action **Ranged** 10
Target: One creature
Attack: Charisma vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d12 + Charisma modifier radiant damage. If target is bloodied, it is blinded until the end of your next turn.
Sustain Minor: Make a Charisma vs. Will attack against any target in range. On a hit, deal radiant damage equal to your Charisma modifier.

Level 2 Utility Spell

Fevered Certainty of Caiphon Warlock (Star) Utility 2

You send your thoughts to Caiphon, the Dream Whisperer, whose direction lies beyond the farthest void, which is normally unknowable. Flush with the eldritch vision, a mad certainty floods your body and mind.

Daily ✦ Arcane, Implement
Minor Action **Personal**
Effect: Until the end of your next turn, you gain a +5 power bonus to all skill checks, but you take a –2 penalty to your Will defense.

Level 3 Encounter Spell

Hands of Ihbar Warlock (Star) Attack 3

Inky black, frigid tendrils emerge as if from your foe's own body. The tendrils curl and wind around their parent so tightly that blood flow and movement are hampered.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Cold, Implement
Standard Action **Ranged** 10
Target: One creature
Attack: Charisma vs. Will
Hit: 2d12 + Charisma modifier cold damage, and the target is slowed until the end of your next turn.
Star Pact: If the target has cold resistance, it is reduced by a number of points equal to your level (save ends).

Level 5 Daily Spells

Fury of Gibbeth Warlock (Star) Attack 5

You revive the memory of ancient Gibbeth the Endless, slain before the primordials' forge fires burned. Though formless, even the imperfect recollection of Gibbeth strikes out with all-too-real limbs of hate before you hastily forget it.

Daily ✦ Arcane, Fear, Force, Implement
Standard Action **Ranged** 10
Target: One creature
Attack: Intelligence +2 vs. Reflex
Hit: 3d10 + Intelligence modifier damage, and the target must succeed on an Acrobatics check that has a DC equal to 10 + Charisma modifier + one-half level or fall prone. At the start of its turn, the target must succeed on another Acrobatics check (DC as above) or fall prone again (save ends).
Miss: Half damage, and the target must make an Acrobatics check or fall prone. Cannot be sustained.

Level 6 Utility Spells

Red Leeches of Nihal Warlock (Star) Utility 6

Wriggling scarlet worms writhe suddenly across your foe's body before dissolving just as quickly into odious vapor. When their rank odor stings your nostrils, stolen energy shudders through you.

Daily ✦ Arcane, Implement
Immediate Interrupt **Ranged** 10
Trigger: One target in range spends an action point or a healing surge.
Effect: You gain a number of temporary hit points equal to your second wind value.

Rending Fear of Khirad Warlock (Star) Utility 6

A pale blue flame springs up from your brow as you incant the apocalypses over which Khirad has burned, thus hoping to frighten your foe into an admission.

Daily ✦ Arcane, Charm, Fear, Implement
Standard Action **Close** touch
Target: One helpless intelligent enemy
Effect: You demand that the target answer one question. If you share a language, your helpless target provides the answer to the best of its knowledge, without distortion. Each round, ask a new question if your target remains helpless, up to a number of questions equal to 1 + your Charisma modifier.

Level 7 Encounter Spells

Far Realm Phantasm Warlock (Star) Attack 7

You give brief life to the image of the creature you periodically see in visions hungrily whispering your name. Though your breath comes quicker, your target is caught unprepared for the mind-wrenching vision.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Fear, Implement, Psychic
Standard Action **Ranged** 10
Target: One creature
Attack: Charisma vs. Will
Hit: 1d6 + Charisma modifier psychic damage, and the target spends its next standard action making a basic attack against the empty air.
Star Pact: The target takes a -2 penalty to its Will defense until the end of your next turn.

Influence of Acamar Warlock (Star) Attack 7

Crackling black energy shrouds your body as you briefly take on the least aspect of Acamar, a dark and distant star. Your closest foe is struck by a stray bolt and is pulled toward you.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Implement, Necrotic
Standard Action **Ranged** 10
Target: One enemy closest to you
Attack: Charisma vs. Reflex
Hit: 3d8 + Charisma modifier necrotic damage, and you pull the target a number of squares equal to your Charisma modifier.
Star Pact: This spell's range is 20 instead of 10.

Level 9 Daily Spell

Brood of Hadar Warlock (Star) Attack 9

You call upon Hadar the Ebon Hunger. Your foe screams, clutches its head, and falls. Flying, fluttering, fanged shadows pour from your foe's open eyes, mouth, and ears, and descend upon one of your foe's allies.

Daily ✦ Arcane, Implement, Necrotic
Standard Action **Ranged** 10
Target: One creature
Attack: Constitution +2 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 3d10 + Constitution modifier necrotic damage. If this damage is enough to drop the target to 0 hit points, make a secondary attack.
Secondary Target: One enemy within 3 squares of the primary target.
Secondary Attack: Charisma vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d10 + Charisma modifier necrotic damage. If the secondary target is cursed, it takes extra damage normally if hit.
Miss: Half damage, and no secondary attack even if the enemy drops to 0 hit points.

Level 10 Utility Spell

Troublesome Aid of Caiphon Warlock (Star) Utility 10

When an ally grants you the grace of renewed health, you leverage your knowledge of Caiphon's healing lore to gain even greater advantage than was offered—but at what price?

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Implement
Immediate Interrupt **Ranged** 10
Trigger: One ally in range grants you the use of a healing surge.
Effect: In addition to the normal number of hit points you regain, you regain a number of hit points equal to your healing surge value. However, until the end of the encounter, you die after failing your second, rather than third, death save.

Level 13 Encounter Spell

Blaze of Ulban Warlock (Star) Attack 13

You channel the blue-white fire of Ulban, whose burning glory captivates mortal minds even as it consumes them.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Implement, Radiant
Standard Action **Ranged** 10
Target: One creature
Attack: Charisma vs. Will
Hit: 2d8 + Charisma modifier radiant damage, and slide one enemy within 5 squares of the target 2 squares.
Star Pact: If this attack hits, the target takes a -2 penalty to its next saving throw.

Level 15 Daily Spells

Visage of Zhudun Warlock (Star) Attack 15

You manifest an aspect of the blank face of dead Zhudan, creating a zone of horror that hammers at the sanity of those caught within it.

Daily ✦ Arcane, Fear, Implement, Psychic, Zone
Standard Action **Area** burst 1 within 10 squares
Effect: The burst creates the semblance of a monstrous face until the end of your next turn, blocking line of sight. Creatures that enter the zone or start their turns there take 3d10 psychic damage.
Sustain Minor: When you sustain the power, you make a secondary attack.
Secondary Target: Each creature within the zone
Secondary Attack: Charisma vs. Will
Hit: 1d10 + Charisma modifier psychic damage, and the target is slowed until the end of your next turn.

Far Realm Glimpse Warlock (Star) Attack 15

You call up a vision of a space inhabited by vast entities whose vile, miles-long limbs churn an amoebic sea to bloody froth. Your foe screams and scrambles to get away.

Daily ✦ Arcane, Fear, Implement, Psychic
Standard Action **Ranged** 10
Target: One creature
Attack: Charisma +2 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 3d8 + Charisma modifier psychic damage and the target is dazed (save ends). A target who does not move its full speed away from you on its next turn takes 2d8 + Charisma modifier damage and is dazed (save ends).

Level 16 Utility Spell

Caiphon's Disquieting Liberty Warlock (Star) Utility 16

You call out to Caiphon, the Dream Whisperer, an entity who is both unimaginably far and worryingly close. Caiphon gives you your liberty, but sips a bit of your life in return.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Implement
Minor Action **Personal**
Effect: Choose one of the following conditions that you currently suffer: immobilized, restrained, or slowed. That condition immediately ends. However, you also take 5 damage.

Level 17 Encounter Spell

Delban's Eye Warlock (Star) Attack 17

A slanting shaft of frigid starlight shines down and illuminates your foe, revealing it in a spasm of chill agony. Your foe realizes you've turned the dire attention of a fell entity upon it.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Cold, Implement
Standard Action **Ranged** 10
Target: One creature
Attack: Charisma vs. Fortitude
Hit: 3d10 + Charisma modifier cold damage, and the target is marked until the end of your next turn. The target loses concealment and total concealment while marked.
Star Pact: All attacks against the target deal an extra 1d6 + Charisma modifier damage while it is marked by the power.

Level 19 Daily Spell

Dark Side of the Moon Warlock (Star) Attack 19

The moon, waning gibbous, swims into view overhead, but something is wrong. Its craters host eyes larger than seas, and the fracture lines writhe and crawl, revealing themselves as continent-sized tentacles.

Daily ✦ Arcane, Fear, Implement, Psychic
Standard Action **Ranged** 10
Target: One creature
Attack: Charisma +2 vs. Will
Hit: 4d10 + Charisma modifier psychic damage, and the target is slowed and restricted to making basic attacks until the end of your next turn.
Miss: Half damage.

Level 22 Utility Spell

Ulban's Shining Cloak Warlock (Star) Utility 22

The blue-white fire of Ulban sears your flesh with a flash of otherworldly light, but grants you an extra measure of protection against the attacks of distant foes.

Daily ✦ Arcane, Implement, Radiant
Immediate Interrupt **Personal**
Trigger: You are hit by a ranged attack.
Effect: You gain a power bonus to the defense targeted by the attack equal to your Intelligence modifier. If the triggering attack misses you because of this bonus, the target of the attack changes from you to the attacker. The attacker rolls his attack again to determine if he hits himself.

Level 23 Encounter Spell

Starless Void Warlock (Star) Attack 23

A shadow from the wintry void between stars falls upon your foe, shrouding it with a layer of celestial frost that hinders its ability to defend itself.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Cold, Fear, Implement
Standard Action **Ranged** 10
Target: One creature
Attack: Constitution vs. Fortitude
Hit: 4d8 + Constitution modifier cold damage, and the target grants combat advantage to all your allies until the end of your next turn.
Star Pact: If this attack hits, the target takes a penalty to AC equal to your Intelligence modifier until the end of your next turn.

Level 25 Daily Spell

Gibbeth's Embrace Warlock (Star) Attack 25

Pressed and desperate, a stray recollection of Gibbeth the Endless occurs to you. You hastily force the memory upon your foe, who is embraced in a clasp of palpable hate.

Daily ✦ Arcane, Fear, Force, Implement
Standard Action **Ranged** 10
Target: One creature
Attack: Intelligence vs. Reflex
Hit: 5d10 + Intelligence modifier force damage, and ongoing 10 force damage (save ends).
Miss: Half damage, and no ongoing damage.

Level 27 Encounter Spell

Envoy of Nihal Warlock (Star) Attack 27

You call beyond the boundaries of matter, space, and perhaps even sanity. Nihal answers by sending a humanoid-shaped hole in reality filled with writhing red worms, which fall upon your foe.

Encounter ✦ Acid, Arcane, Fear, Healing, Implement
Standard Action **Ranged** 10
Target: One creature
Attack: Charisma vs. Reflex
Hit: 4d10 + Charisma modifier acid damage. If your target takes damage from this attack, you can spend a healing surge.
Star Pact: Add double your Charisma modifier to the hit points regained from the healing surge.

Level 29 Daily Spell

Caiphon's Abominable Melody Warlock (Star) Attack 29

The atonal song of Caiphon, the Dream Whisperer, pierces the fabric between worlds. Your foe covers its ears, closes its eyes, and begins to shriek. Even so, notes of the horrible tune are still faintly audible above the screaming.

Daily ✦ Arcane, Fear, Implement, Psychic
Standard Action **Ranged** 10
Target: One creature
Attack: Charisma +2 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 6d8 + Charisma modifier psychic damage, and the target is deafened (save ends), blinded (save ends), and slowed (save ends); a separate save is required to relieve each condition. Each round a target begins its round suffering from any one of the conditions you inflicted upon it, it takes another 1d6 + Charisma modifier psychic damage, and you can slide the target a number spaces up to your Charisma modifier. Until the end of the encounter, any time you take damage roll a d20. If you roll 10 or higher, reduce the damage to 0.
Special: Each round a target is still affected by this spell, the ally (or you) closest to the target hears an echo of abominable melody and takes 1d10 psychic damage.

Paragon Path

Student of Caiphon

"The Dream Whisperer pays more attention to the world than any other of its ilk. It might have a plan and a part to play in the world's final destiny."

Prerequisites: Warlock class, star pact

You studied the limitless abysses and the bright points of enigmatic light that hang between them. You listened to the baffling disordered sounds that emerged from the simple astronomical lenses you used for your study. You learned the stars were not the innocent lamps above the world that most assumed. Despite this unsettling knowledge, you continued your study, eventually narrowing your concentration to just one star—a star named Caiphon. That's when the dreams began.

You dreamed of a fitful star of purple fire. You walked in its light to the edge of a slime-lined pit that pulsed and heaved like a living maw, eager to consume. You hurled yourself into the cavity as the purple star flared. You fell into an amoebic sea, where you were digested over the course of a thousand years, or perhaps just one night.

When you woke, your eyes were opalescent purple orbs, and Caiphon began whispering—*whispering*—into your ear. Even though you could hear only the merest fragments of Caiphon's never-ending instructions and insights, a knowing smile stitched itself across your face.

Student of Caiphon Path Features

Star Bright (11th level): When you spend an action point to take an extra action, if you use your action to make an attack that hits, that hit deals ongoing 5 radiant damage (save ends). Such powers are considered to have the radiant keyword.

Caiphon's Guidance (11th level): You can score critical hits with fear and radiant powers on a roll of 18–20.

Caiphon's Intercession (16th level): You can choose to use Caiphon's Intercession in place of your Fate of the Void pact boon when an enemy under your Warlock's Curse drops to 0 hit points or fewer. One ally of your choice within 10 squares of you can make an immediate melee basic attack against a target you choose; if the attack hits, it deals ongoing 5 radiant damage (save ends) in addition to normal damage. If your ally makes the attack, Caiphon takes its due and deals 5 damage to your ally. If your ally refuses to accept Caiphon's Intercession, you take 5 damage (despite the fact no attack was made); in such an instance, you regain the use of Fate of the Void pact boon for the dropped target.

Student of Caiphon Spells

Trust in the Guide Star Student of Caiphon Attack 11

You squeeze tight your eyes and call upon the Purple Star to grasp your mind and guide your strike true.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Implement, Radiant
Standard Action **Ranged** 10
Target: One creature
Attack: Charisma vs. Will
Special: You ignore penalties for cover (but not superior cover), concealment, and total concealment. You can attack an invisible target as if it wasn't invisible.
Hit: 2d10 + Charisma modifier radiant damage.

Steps on the Purple Stair Student of Caiphon Utility 12

At Caiphon's bidding, you take a half step into a temporary echo plane where wind shrieks like the screams of tortured lunatics and where indescribable colors squirm across your skin. Something shudders on the horizon, but you step fully back into the world before its identity resolves.

Encounter ✦ Arcane
Minor Action **Personal**
Effect: You gain invisibility and flying until the start of your next turn. On your next turn you take ongoing 3 psychic damage (save ends).

Caiphon's Hungry Mercy Student of Caiphon Utility 20

Your guide star offers all who heed your sudden rant to "Trust in Caiphon!" a boon of renewed power. Your lord requires only a sip of life from each ally who partakes. So little in return for so much!

Daily ✦ Arcane
Minor Action **Close** burst 10
Target: You and all allies in range.
Effect: You and each ally in range can spend a healing surge to recover a power. Each player's character choosing to do so rolls 1d6. On a 1-5, that character recovers an encounter power. On a 6, that character recovers a daily power.

Epic Destiny

Radiant One

The world and its echoes are but motes in the eye of a far grander, if more terrifyingly incomprehensible, vista. You are unafraid, nay eager, to risk even madness unending, if only you can learn the underlying truth of existence.

Prerequisite: 21st level

Lesser souls than you were overwhelmed by their study of the uncaring stars. Instead of commanding their own fate, they were transformed into mere pawns and cultists. With features shadowed under voluminous hoods, they toppled glare-eyed and drool-speckled into the clutch of mad entities. That is not to be your fate. You've divined a different truth in the cold pinpricks in night's endless void. Instead of pawn, you intend to be the master. You plan to have your force of will shine, burning forever. Unlike other stars that serve as windows, perhaps, to monstrous entities of an impossibly distant realm, your radiance is merely your own cognizance spreading ever outward.

The unschooled believe a radiant one is nothing more than a servitor to the vast enigmatic creatures you court. True, others who have traveled your path have burned out, unleashing cataclysms that killed allies, corrupted monarchs, and even laid waste to kingdoms (and some whisper, previous ages of the world). You know these cautionary tales, and so forewarned you are forearmed should any of the powers from whom you draw your strength seek to suborn your will. Your allies have nothing to fear from you—if you are careful.

Immortality

Ultimate knowledge, bereft of all filters, easy illusions, and misleading metaphors is what you seek. Soon enough, it will all be yours.

First Light: When you complete your final quest, the last pieces of the puzzle of reality begin to fall into place. The stars themselves began to sing to you, their sibling. You begin to gleam, as if your skin is but a shell covering a mighty lamp. Upon putting your affairs in order, you travel to a far place. Finally, you ignite in an explosion of stellar glory. Like a demigod, you ascend into the night sky, becoming finally a star yourself—one associated with eldritch wisdom. Or, perhaps madness. Either way, your name takes its rightful place among the constellations and becomes one by which you invoke your abilities.

Radiant One Destiny Features

All radiant ones have the following features.

Starborn (21st level): You gain resistance to radiant fire damage equal to 10 + your level. Any time you deal damage to a target who gives you combat advantage, you deal extra radiant fire damage equal to your Intelligence modifier.

Starburst (24th level): The first time you are reduced to 0 hit points or fewer each day, you gain the immediate use of a healing surge and deal radiant fire damage of equal value to all enemies within 3 squares of you.

Starry Rift (30th level): Your dawning understanding of reality and the façadelike nature of time and space allow you to take "shortcuts" through time itself. Once per day you can tell the DM that your turn has come up again. Treat this action as if you had chosen to take the delay action (even if you took your last turn normally without delaying).

Radiant One Power

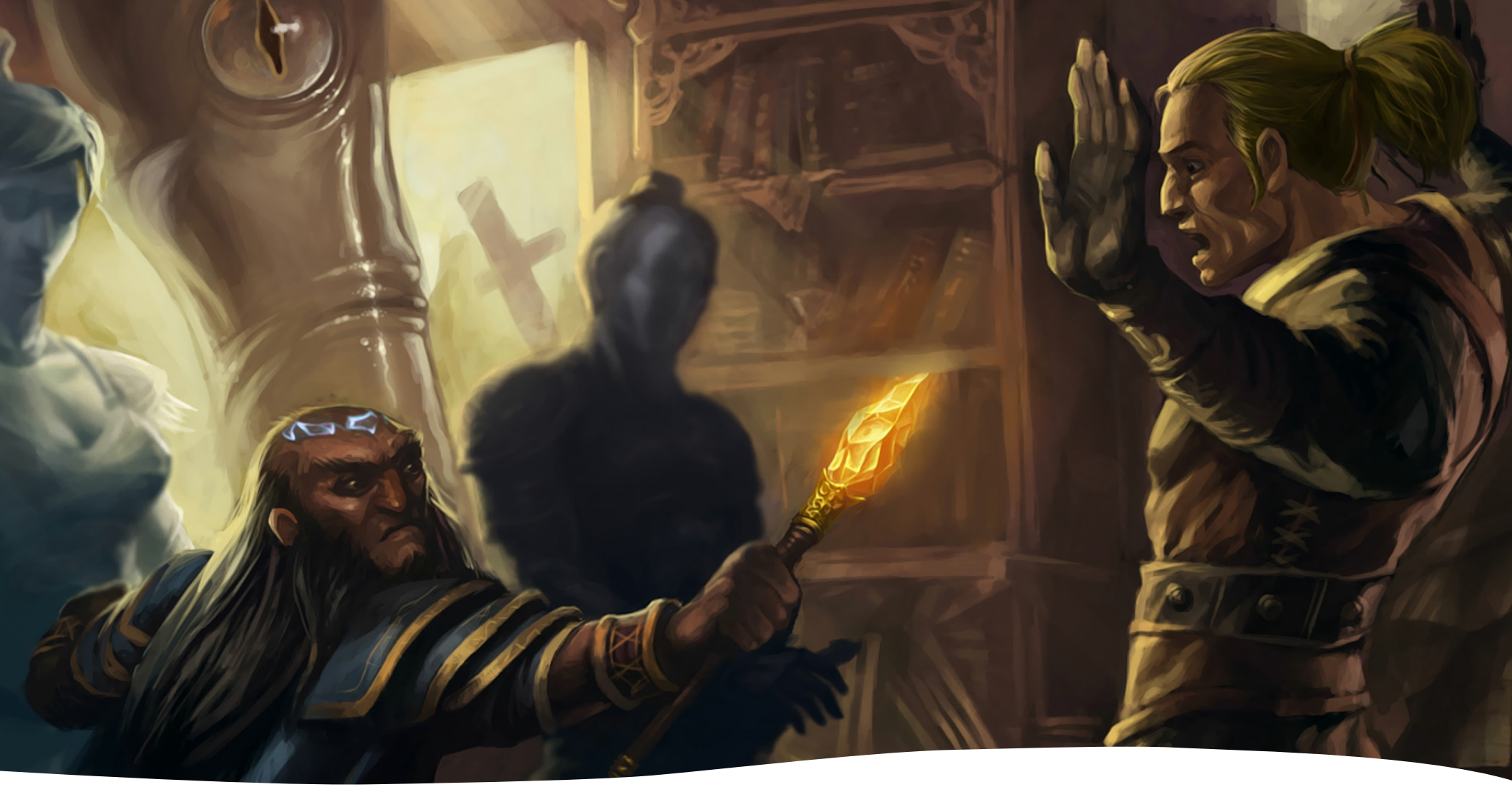
Star Flesh Radiant One Utility 26

With a flare of starfire, you ignite with eye-searing flame. Your foes find it difficult to target you, and your starfire burns away many attacks that would have otherwise found you.

Daily ✦ Arcane, Fire, Implement, Radiant
Standard Action **Personal**
Effect: All spaces within 20 squares of you are lit with bright light. You gain an untyped bonus equal to your Intelligence modifier to all your defenses.
If a ranged, area, or close attack hits you, roll a saving throw If you succeed, the radiance and fire of your form incinerates the attack, and you are unharmed.
Your *star flesh* lasts until the end of the encounter.

About the Author

Bruce Cordell is a D&D designer, but during his twelve years in the game industry, he has dabbled in miniatures, board games, collectible card games, d20 games, and more. Bruce has over a sixty listed credits to his name, including the *Expanded Psionics Handbook*, *Libris Mortis*, and *Expedition to Castle Ravenloft*. His body of work also includes three published *Forgotten Realms* novels (*Lady of Poison*, *Darkvision*, and *Stardeep*), with more on the way.



Ritually Speaking

by Peter Schaefer

illustrations by John Stanko, Tina Young, and Rock Niu

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IN DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, rituals provide some of the most flexible options for your heroes. They represent all the magic that isn't designed for combat, from cleansing your clothes to moving an entire village hundreds of miles across the continent. Rituals cost nothing to learn (though they might be expensive to *find*), so a ritual caster should learn as many as possible. Acquire all the rituals you can and accrue an enormous body of mystic literature describing the many strange things you can accomplish through ritual.

The *Player's Handbook* covers the basics of ritual casting. The assortment of travel rituals and exploration rituals there will keep you busy for a while. But when your ritual caster starts to feel the pinch, gets the urge to have more options hidden under the cover of that expensive ritual book, take a look here. Some of these rituals expand on the ideas in the *Player's Handbook*, pushing the boundaries of teleportation or interpolating lesser wards, and others break new ground—literally, in the case of Excavation.

Arcane Barrier

You pound on the translucent wall and shout, but no amount of brute force seems able to penetrate the barrier in your path.

Level: 12
Category: Warding
Time: 10 minutes
Duration: 4 hours
Component Cost: 1,000 gp
Market Price: 3,200 gp
Key Skill: Arcana

You create a magical barrier that is up to 2 squares long and tall, and is typically large enough to block a doorway or the entrance of a hallway. The obstruction is invisible from more than 10 squares away but is readily apparent as a translucent, shimmering, paper-thin wall from closer than that.

When creating the barrier, you also determine circumstances that open the barrier; this is the same as for Arcane Lock (*Player's Handbook*, page 301). Your Arcana check, with a +5 bonus, determines the DC for Knock or similar rituals to open it, and the DC to burst the barrier with a Strength check is 5 greater than that.

If you spend 4 hours and four times the component costs to perform this ritual, the duration increases to permanent. A ritual caster who uses Knock or a similar ritual to open a permanent Arcane Barrier can choose to bring it down temporarily, in which case it seals again after 5 minutes, or to destroy the barrier.

Banish Vermin

Minor preparation is all it takes to ward against pests.

Level: 1
Category: Warding
Time: 10 minutes
Duration: Special
Component Cost: 10 gp
Market Price: 30 gp
Key Skill: Nature

You ward a single zone, up to burst 5, to be unpleasant to all kinds of unwanted rodents and insects of size Tiny or smaller, even if they are part of a swarm. Any vermin that are in the burst must leave by the most expedient means possible, and none enter the affected area for a period determined by your Nature check result.

Check Result	Duration
9 or lower	3 days
10–19	1 week
20–29	2 weeks
30 or higher	1 month

Battlefield Elocution

With your voice magically amplified, every soul in the army standing before you can hear your words.

Level: 3
Category: Exploration
Time: 10 minutes
Duration: 1 hour
Component Cost: 25 gp
Market Price: 125 gp
Key Skill: Arcana or Religion (no check)

You gain the ability to speak so that all creatures within 100 squares with a DC 0 Perception check can hear you. Only words you desire to be heard so broadly are. You or another creature under this effect can transfer the power to a willing recipient with a touch and a minor action as long as the effect persists. For some ritual casters, this spell makes their voices loud as thunder; others' voices ring in people's ears without crossing the intervening space.

Bolster Object

Though it looks no different, the iron portcullis has become harder than steel. The ram can batter itself to flinders before the portcullis gives way.

Level: 6
Category: Warding
Time: 10 minutes
Duration: Instantaneous
Component Cost: 150 gp
Market Price: 300 gp
Key Skill: Arcana or Nature

The target object, which you must touch during the performance of the ritual, increases its hit points by 10% for every 5 points you have on your check result. An object targeted by this ritual multiple times benefits only from the best casting.

Chameleon's Cloak

No one can notice you or your friends thanks to the concealing cloak of magic you have conjured.

Level: 10
Category: Deception
Time: 10 minutes
Duration: 24 hours
Component Cost: 200 gp
Market Price: 1,000 gp
Key Skill: Arcana

You conceal yourself and up to 8 allies within 5 squares of you, using a combination of camouflage and distraction to ensure that no one notices any of you. The Perception DC to notice a creature concealed by this ritual is equal to the Arcana or Nature check result with a +5 bonus. A concealed creature that leaves the square it occupies at the completion of the ritual or that attacks a creature loses all benefit from the ritual.

Conceal Object

Some say the safest place to hide something is in plain sight. For you, the safest place to hide something is wherever you want.

Level: 10
Category: Deception
Time: 10 minutes
Duration: Permanent
Component Cost: 400 gp
Market Price: 2,000 gp
Key Skill: Arcana

One object within 5 squares of you becomes difficult to notice, no matter how obvious it is. Any creature with line of sight to the object is entitled to a Perception check at a DC equal to your Arcana check result with a +5 bonus. A creature that touches the object gains a +5 bonus to the check, and a creature that is rudely forced to notice the object (such as by walking into a wall it was unable to notice) automatically sees the concealed object. Moving the concealed object ends the effect.

Deceive Sensor

Enemies who spy on you see only what you want them to see.

Level: 26
Category: Deception
Time: 30 minutes
Duration: 24 hours
Component Cost: 45,000 gp
Market Price: 325,000 gp
Key Skill: Arcana

You weave an illusion that only scrying sensors can see around yourself or another creature within 5 squares of you during the ritual. Any scrying sensor within 10 squares of an affected creature sees only the illusion you choose at the ritual's conclusion. The illusion can contain anything you desire, with up to 5 minutes of programmed actions. Creatures viewing the illusion are entitled to an Insight check to detect the fact that it is false. This check's DC equals your Arcana check result. A creature is allowed a check the first time it sees the illusion.

Delay Affliction

With effort and focus, you prevent an ally from continuing to suffer from his ailment . . . for now.

Level: 4
Category: Restoration
Time: 30 minutes
Duration: Special
Component Cost: 50 gp
Market Price: 175 gp
Key Skill: Heal

Delay Affliction puts a single enduring effect, any of those affected by Remove Affliction, on hold for a period determined by the ritual caster's check result. Until that time is up, the target acts in all ways as though he or she were not affected by the affliction. Upon completing this ritual, make a Heal check, using the level of the effect you are trying to delay (or the level of the creature that caused the effect) as a penalty to this check.

Heal Check Result	Duration
9 or lower	1 day
10-19	3 days
20-29	1 week
30 or higher	2 weeks

Delver's Fire

This campfire burns anywhere but underwater.

Level: 2
Category: Exploration
Time: 10 minutes
Duration: 8 hours
Component Cost: 25 gp
Market Price: 100 gp
Key Skill: Arcana or Nature (no check)

You create a campfire that burns on any horizontal surface, and it needs no fuel beyond your magic. It burns for 8 hours or until doused as any normal fire can be doused.

Earthen Ramparts

At your command, walls of earth rise around your position and offer protection.

Level: 6
Category: Exploration
Time: 10 minutes
Duration: Instantaneous
Component Cost: 80 gp
Market Price: 360 gp
Key Skill: Arcana or Nature

You channel the earth around you into defensive mounds. Earth rises to create a wall 2 within 10 squares of you. The wall is 2 squares high. On one side of the wall (your choice), the earthen mound is sloped so creatures can climb atop the wall. Climbing atop the mound from that

side costs an extra square of movement. For every 10 points you have on an Arcana or Nature check result, you can create another wall 2 within 10 squares.

Excavation

Earth and loose stone disappear bit by bit before your eyes, leaving a rough trench in its wake.

Level: 6
Category: Exploration
Time: 10 minutes
Duration: 1 minute
Component Cost: 70 gp
Market Price: 300 gp
Key Skill: Arcana

You clear 1 square of earth and loose stone within 5 squares of you, leaving the start of a trench or a tunnel. For every 10 points on the Arcana check result, you clear another square. The material disappears over the course of the ritual's duration and is scattered across the world.

Explorer's Fire

You enchant a fire so that it isn't visible from more than a short distance, in the hope that it won't attract unwanted attention.

Level: 1
Category: Exploration
Time: 10 minutes
Duration: 8 hours
Component Cost: 10 gp
Market Price: 50 gp
Key Skill: Arcana or Nature

You alter one fire of bonfire size or smaller within 5 squares of you. Light cast by the fire cannot be seen from more than 5 squares from the fire. The fire's light is unchanged within that radius, and the ritual does not diminish or contain the fire's heat or sounds.

Farsight

Your senses reach to the horizon when you will it.

Level: 16
Category: Scrying
Time: 10 minutes
Duration: Special
Component Cost: 3,600 gp, plus a focus worth 2,500 gp
Market Price: 9,000 gp
Key Skill: Arcana

Farsight functions as the Wizard's Sight ritual, but you can place your scrying sensor in any square you can see, no matter how far. You can see and hear as if you were standing there, and you have darkvision through the sensor. Use the Perception skill to determine whether you hear quiet sounds or notice unobtrusive things while observing an area through the sensor. You cannot place the scrying sensor in a location you can see only through a scrying sensor.

Your Arcana check result determines how long the sensor lasts.

Arcana Check Result	Duration
19 or lower	2 rounds
20-24	3 rounds
25-29	4 rounds
30-39	5 rounds
40 or higher	6 rounds

The ritual creates a scrying sensor—a shimmer in the air—that watchful creatures might notice. Creatures must succeed at a Perception check with a DC equal to 10 + your level to notice the sensor. They can't disrupt or interact with the sensor in any way.

Sufficiently powerful warding magic, such as the Forbiddance ritual, can block Farsight. If the location is warded in such a manner, you learn that as soon as you begin the ritual, so you can interrupt the ritual and not expend any components.

Focus: A mirror or a crystal ball worth at least 2,500 gp. The focus conveys what you see and hear.

Fastidiousness

You are clean, and you would like to remain so, even while digging through aboleth slime for lost treasures.

Level: 1
Category: Warding
Time: 10 minutes
Duration: 24 hours
Component Cost: 10 gp
Market Price: 50 gp
Key Skill: Arcana (no check)

You or a creature within 2 squares of you is warded against becoming dirty. No matter what the target does, touches, walks through, or experiences, the target's person, clothes, and carried possessions are not soiled. If the target is in any way soiled when the ritual is completed, that filth is immediately shed. Attacks or other effects that involve dirtying the character work as normal but leave no lasting waste or residue.

Memory Seal

Some things are better left forgotten, and you will see to it that they are.

Level: 18
Category: Binding
Time: 1 hour
Duration: Permanent
Component Cost: 7,000 gp
Market Price: 25,000 gp
Key Skill: Arcana

You lock a single memory away so that the targeted creature can no longer recall it. A single memory sealed away by this ritual can be specific ("seeing me stealing the Darlingian Scepter" or "how to enter my secret laboratory") or general ("what you read in my journal" or "the last conversation you had today").

A target of this ritual must be either willing or helpless for the duration of the ritual. You can target yourself with this ritual only if you have at least one assistant in performing it. On an unwilling target, your Arcana check result must beat the target's Will defense for the ritual to succeed, in addition to determining how hard the ritual is on the target (in terms of damage; see below).

Arcana Check Result	Effect on Target
24 or lower	Damage equal to the target's maximum hit points
25-29	Damage equal to three-quarters the target's maximum hit points
30-34	Damage equal to one-half the target's maximum hit points
35-39	Damage equal to one-quarter the target's maximum hit points
40 or higher	No damage

Mordenkainen's Ascent

You create a magic golden ladder or rope, which allows you access to the highest heights.

Level: 6
Category: Exploration
Time: 10 minutes
Duration: 1 hour
Component Cost: 75 gp
Market Price: 360 gp
Key Skill: Arcana

You create a ladder that is firmly attached to a wall within 5 squares of you, or a knotted rope tied to something within 20 squares of you. Climbing the ladder is a DC 0 check, and climbing the rope is a DC 10 check; other factors, such as rain, high winds, or slippery oil, never make the task more difficult. The ladder reaches a maximum height of 4 squares, plus 1 for every 5 points on your Arcana check result. The rope has a maximum length of 10 squares, plus 1 for every 5 points on your Arcana check result.

Mordenkainen's Joining

You join two blocks of stone as though they had been cut and dragged that way from the mountain. With your help, the wall should have no gaps whatsoever.

Level: 6
Category: Creation
Time: 10 minutes
Duration: Instantaneous
Component Cost: 50 gp
Market Price: 360 gp
Key Skill: Arcana (no check)

Two nonliving objects join together permanently. The boundary between them becomes as smooth and unnoticeable as possible—for objects that could fit together naturally, such as two blocks of stone, two planks of wood, or two pieces of a weapon, the ritual makes them completely seamless.

Overland Flight

Where you come from, they say "as you fly" and not "as the crow flies."

Level: 20
Category: Exploration
Time: 30 minutes
Duration: 10 hours
Component Cost: 5,000 gp
Market Price: 25,000 gp
Key Skill: Arcana (no check)

You and all allies within 5 squares of you gain overland flight 20. You lose your minor, immediate, and standard actions while flying at your overland flight speed, and can use your move action only to fly. You fly the specified number of squares with a single move action. If you take actions to do anything else, you crash. When using this ritual to fly for 10 hours, including rests, you can travel approximately 100 miles.

Preserve Flame

Under winter rain or the ocean's depths, the old mage's fires burned just as well as in midsummer.

Level: 6
Category: Exploration
Time: 10 minutes
Duration: 8 hours
Component Cost: 75 gp
Market Price: 360 gp
Key Skill: Arcana (no check)

You alter one fire of bonfire size or smaller within 5 squares of you. No amount of water or effort can douse the flame until the ritual's duration expires. The ritual caster can voluntarily end this effect as a minor action.

Preservation

Wizards use this spell to keep their tomes from mold and other dangers. Explorers wish the wizards would do the same for trail rations.

Level: 2
Category: Warding
Time: 10 minutes
Duration: Permanent
Component Cost: 25 gp
Market Price: 100 gp
Key Skill: Arcana or Nature

You enchant a quantity of nonliving organic material so that it resists all natural deterioration. Rot, mold, consuming vermin, and the like all leave the enchanted material alone. Damage intentionally done can still harm the material.

Your Arcana or Nature check determines how much material you can affect with one ritual casting.

Arcana or Nature Check Result	Duration
19 or lower	10 pounds
20–24	20 pounds
25–29	50 pounds
30–39	100 pounds
40 or higher	200 pounds

Planar Sending

Through your magic, you can communicate with creatures on other planes.

Level: 14
Category: Exploration
Time: 20 minutes
Duration: Instantaneous
Component Cost: 700 gp
Market Price: 4,200 gp
Key Skill: Arcana (no check)

You convey a mental message of up to 25 words to a person you know on another plane. You must choose a plane when you complete the ritual. If the target is not on that plane, he or she does not receive the message.

Safeguard

Your skin tingles and the back of your mind screams with impending danger. You and your allies are safe, but your home suffers intruders.

Level: 16
Category: Warding
Time: 2 hours
Duration: 24 hours
Component Cost: 3,600 gp and 3 healing surges
Market Price: 13,500 gp
Key Skill: Arcana

You ward an area against intrusion, setting an Eye of Alarm (*Player's Handbook*, page 304) anywhere within 20 squares of where you perform the ritual. If the eye detects an intruder, it psychically and silently alerts you no matter where you are, and you can teleport to the square the eye occupies as a standard action. Up to 8 willing allies within 10 squares of you can accompany you, appearing adjacent to you, or as near as possible at the end of the teleportation.

The eye never considers you an intruder, you can designate any number of other ritual participants as non-intruders, and you can designate additional categories of creatures that do not set off the alarm, as normal for the Eye of Alarm. Most who perform this ritual allow it to ignore small creatures and pests, since the eye does not describe what sets it off.

The warding effect lasts for 24 hours, but the ritual caster (not any assistants) can extend this duration by spending a healing surge every 24 hours to sustain it. The caster does not need to be in the same area or even on the same plane to sustain the effect. If the ritual's effect is sustained without interruption for a year and a day, the effect becomes permanent.

Your Arcana check result determines how many eyes you can place and what type of vision or sensory ability they possess.

Arcana Check Result	Eyes Created	Vision or Ability
19 or lower	One	Normal
20–39	Three	Darkvision
40 or higher	Five	Darkvision and tremorsense 12 squares

Scribe

There is a faint scratching sound, like that of a quill, as the words you speak appear on the paper lying on the desk.

Level: 10
Category: Exploration
Time: 10 minutes
Duration: 2 hours
Component Cost: 200 gp
Market Price: 1,000 gp
Key Skill: Arcana

You enchant a stack of paper or a book to capture the words spoken around it, recording them as a faithful and infallible stenographer. There is no apparent writing implement, just a slight scratching sound as the words appear. The component costs include 5 gp for ink the ritual exhausts; a ritual caster who wishes the transcription to be of higher quality should replace this cost with that of higher-quality inks.

The phantom scribe does its best to correctly record what is said in its hearing (its Perception bonus is equal to your Arcana bonus) and properly attribute each statement. It cannot attribute words from a creature it does not know. Depending on the caster's personality, a scribe might name unknown speakers colorfully, as the "Dark Stranger" or "Breathless Guest"; or simply, with labels such as "Unknown Speaker One." If such a speaker is later identified, the scribe records that.

Signal of Pursuit

As you attune your senses to the portal, you know that the next time someone steps through it, you will be able to learn everything about their identity.

Level: 8
Category: Divination
Time: 1 minute
Duration: 1 hour
Component Cost: 125 gp
Market Price: 680 gp
Key Skill: Arcana

You enchant a door within 5 squares of where you complete the ritual. The next time that door is opened, you know, as long as you are on the same plane. Depending on your Arcana check result, you can learn more.

Optional Focus: If you leave a small crystal model of the door worth at least 100 gp within 5 squares of the affected door, the ritual's duration becomes permanent as long as the model remains within 5 squares of the door.

Arcana Check Result	Information Gained
19 or lower	The door is opened.
20-39	The name of the creature that opened it.
40 or higher	An image of the creature doing it.

Stasis Shell

You render an important object impervious to the rigors of time, encasing it in a smooth, almost imperceptible layer of crystal.

Level: 16
Category: Warding
Time: 1 hour
Duration: Until moved
Component Cost: 1,800 gp
Market Price: 9,000 gp
Key Skill: Arcana

You perform this ritual on an object in your possession, encasing it in a thin layer of crystal. Until a creature moves the object more than 5 squares in a single round, that layer of unbreakable crystal protects the affected object from all damage and from all effects of age. It is as if time has stopped for the object.

Teleport Catcher

Your powerful ward channels all attempted teleports across its boundary into a location of your choosing.

Level: 18
Category: Warding
Time: 30 minutes
Duration: 24 hours (special)
Component Cost: 7,000 gp
Market Price: 20,000 gp
Key Skill: Arcana

Any teleportation attempted across the boundary of the ward created by this ritual goes awry, instead depositing the creature(s) attempting to cross that boundary through teleportation in a square within 100 squares of you that you select during the ritual. If that square is occupied, the affected creature appears in the nearest unoccupied square.

Your Arcana check result determines the size of the warded area, which is a burst (see "Areas of Effect," *Player's Handbook*, page 272).

Arcana Check Result	Warded Area
9 or lower	Burst 1
10-19	Burst 3
20-29	Burst 5
30-39	Burst 8
40 or higher	Burst 12

The warding effect lasts for 24 hours, but the ritual caster (not any assistants) can extend this duration by spending a healing surge every 24 hours to sustain it. The caster does not need to be in the same area or even on the same plane to sustain the effect. If the ritual's effect is sustained without interruption for a year and a day, the effect becomes permanent.

Tenser's Binding

As you complete the ritual, ropes and chains of force wrap around the target, rendering escape all but impossible.

Level: 10
Category: Exploration
Time: 5 minutes
Duration: 12 hours (special)
Component Cost: 400 gp
Market Price: 1,000 gp
Key Skill: Arcana

This ritual affects a target creature, which must be helpless and within 5 squares of the ritual caster for the time spent performing the ritual. At the ritual's completion, the target is bound by arcane chains. Escape from these bonds is at a DC equal to the Arcana check result plus 5, and the ritual's magic prevents the target from teleporting unless the prisoner's level is higher than that of the ritual caster.

Before the ritual expires, it can be renewed by any creature able to perform rituals, not just the original ritual caster. As long as the ritual is not allowed to end, it retains the strength imparted by the original caster.

Tenser's Lift

A pearlescent white platform manifests before you, ready to ascend or descend at your command.

Level: 8
Category: Exploration
Time: 10 minutes
Duration: 10 minutes
Component Cost: 125 gp
Market Price: 680 gp
Key Skill: Arcana (no check)

You create a platform 6 squares by 6 squares in width and length, and it floats a foot off the ground. As a move action, with a mental command, you make it rise or descend up to half your speed, or move 1 square horizontally. It descends to no less than a foot above any solid object. You can dismiss the lift as a minor action, at which time it descends gently to the nearest solid ground before it dissipates.

True Sending

Your mental voice can reach anywhere and everywhere, across planar boundaries or within them.

Level: 20
Category: Exploration
Time: 30 minutes
Duration: Instantaneous
Component Cost: 4,000 gp
Market Price: 25,000 gp
Key Skill: Arcana (no check)

You convey a mental message of up to 50 words to a person you know. The message reaches the intended destination despite any amount of distance between you and the target, including planar boundaries. He or she receives the message mentally and can respond likewise.

Visage of Life

The finger floats in your palm for a moment, and then the image of a young peasant appears. This finger did not, it seems, come from the prince as the villain claims.

Level: 12
Category: Divination
Time: 10 minutes
Duration: 1 minute
Component Cost: 500 gp
Market Price: 2,600 gp
Key Skill: Arcana or Religion (no check)

Using a scrap of once-living material, you create an image of the living thing that produced that scrap. The image that appears before you is actual size and appears as the living thing did before its demise for the ritual's duration. Its pose is neutral and offers no information about the subject at its actual time of death.

Voicecatcher Veil

You create an invisible ward that prevents stray thoughts from getting in or out of your territory, unless you permit them.

Level: 14
Category: Warding
Time: 30 minutes
Duration: 24 hours (special)
Component Cost: 1,600 gp, plus 1 healing surge
Market Price: 4,200 gp
Key Skill: Arcana

No telepathy or other mental communication can cross the boundary of Voicecatcher Veil, unless the creature using it is either of a higher level than the ritual caster who performed the ritual, or that ritual caster permits it. When mental communication is attempted across the ward's boundary, the ritual caster is instantly aware of the attempt and the contents of the message. The caster can then choose to bar the message or let it pass, as long as the caster is capable of thought. (If the caster is incapable of thought or dead, the veil automatically bars all communication.) The ritual caster can pass this power and responsibility on to another creature in the presence of the veil by spending a healing surge; that individual can likewise pass it to another by the same means.

Your Arcana check result determines the size of the warded area, which is a burst (see "Areas of Effect," *Player's Handbook*, page 272).

Arcana Check Result	Warded Area
9 or lower	Burst 1
10-19	Burst 3
20-29	Burst 5
30-39	Burst 8
40 or higher	Burst 12

The warding effect lasts for 24 hours, but the ritual caster (not any assistants) can extend this duration by spending a healing surge every 24 hours to sustain it. The caster does not need to be in the same area or even on the same plane to sustain the effect. If the ritual's effect is sustained without interruption for a year and a day, the effect becomes permanent.

Wizard's Curtain

Some activities call for privacy.

Level: 1
Category: Warding
Time: 10 minutes
Duration: 24 hours
Component Cost: 30 gp
Market Price: 75 gp
Key Skill: Arcana (no check)

You draw a curtain or several curtains from nowhere to ensure your visual privacy. The curtain is nearly opaque and appears in any pattern or colors your desire. The ritual obscures all sight lines into a single room (or a burst 4 area), applying a -10 penalty to Perception checks to see anything inside the warded area

Wizard's Escape

The guard looked on with horror as the prisoner squeezed between the bars of his cell, his face and chest distorting in a fashion that should kill—or at least disfigure—him, then returning to normal.

Level: 6
Category: Exploration
Time: 10 minutes
Duration: 10 minutes
Component Cost: 150 gp
Market Price: 520 gp
Key Skill: Arcana (no check)

For the ritual's duration, you and up to eight allies can squeeze into and through spaces that a Tiny creature can squeeze through, allowing them to fit into crevices, under some doors, and through most barred gates or walls. An affected creature must still squeeze to fit into a space it could not normally enter. How this ritual manifests varies from caster to caster: It can allow creatures to squeeze their body as though boneless, to step through half-dimensions, ripple into and out of smaller shapes, or anything else.

About the Author

How do you solve a problem like Peter Schaefer? You may as well ask how you catch a cloud and pin it down? Peter recommends subduing him with good novels and then distracting him with video games while working with NASA to achieve a long-term solution.

Trapped!

by Matthew Sernett ✦ illustrations by Ryan Barger

WHAT DUNGEON would be complete without a few devious devices? Unfortunately, traps have a nasty habit of reducing the dungeon run to a crawl. The new edition of the game fixes that by making traps more interactive and giving many traps multiple attacks, but you still need to put traps in the right setting to make their inclusion fun and keep them from dragging down your game.

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Top 10 Traps to Avoid

10. **Traps without cause.** Traps should guard something specific or be useful to their makers in combat. Traps that have no apparent reason for being there can annoy players.
9. **Traps out of scope for the trap setters.** If the stone-axe-wielding grimlock warren has a repeating crossbow trap, there had better be a good explanation the PCs can discover.
8. **Too many traps in expected places.** If you put a trap on a treasure chest three adventures in a row, you can expect the PCs to take the next treasure chest they see and toss it down a stairwell to make it open. The same goes for statues and doors. Use traps on common objects sparingly to avoid having them get stale.
7. **Traps that counter PC preparations.** The frost giant's palace of ice had better not have fire traps. Maybe you can justify it, but instead of explaining why you're making the players unhappy, why not make them feel smart and reward their preparations for cold by giving them exciting ice traps?
6. **Traps in unexpected places.** It might be "realistic" or effective to put a trap in a surprising place like the middle of an otherwise unremarkable hallway, but putting traps in places players take for granted means they can't do so anymore. Testing every square before they walk on it is going to slow your game to a crawl.
5. **Traps designed to defeat the rogue.** If your players devote resources to defeating traps, don't punish them by making traps more difficult to overcome. They'll be a lot happier if their choices are meaningful.
4. **Traps that make a PC sit out of the fight.** The greased pit trap in the final encounter room is just going to make the poor player whose PC falls feel bored during what should be the best encounter in the adventure.
3. **Traps without countermeasures.** A trap without countermeasures is about as fun as fighting a monster you can't damage. Give the PCs multiple means of defeating the trap.
2. **Traps that don't give experience.** It might feel like the PCs didn't earn it when they circumvent a trap with a single roll or a clever idea, but not giving XP would be like not giving the players XP for those combats that end in a single round. Sure, they were lucky, but it felt like a great success to them. Allow them to enjoy it.
1. **Deadly traps.** It might make a trap more fearsome to make it cause a lot of damage, but the unseen trap that kills a PC is about as fun as coming home from work to find that your house has been struck by a meteor.

Top 10 Ways to Make Your Traps More Fun

10. **Reward the PCs with treasure.** Perhaps the last victim's skeleton is still impaled on the spear trap, including his belt pouch.
9. **Reveal a world detail.** Perhaps the falling block from the ceiling reveals the ghoulish carving that represents the true deity of the temple.
8. **Have an encounter with the trap keeper.** The PCs can discover information about later traps (assuming the clever trap keeper doesn't figure out a way to deceive them).
7. **Give an adventure tip.** The iron portcullis that drops down to seal the PCs in the hall of spinning blades has a representation of the dungeon complex in the pattern of its iron bars. It's a map!
6. **Give the players something to learn.** If removing the green gem set off the statue's trap, stepping on the green mosaic in the floor sounded the alarm, and turning the green-handled crank made the bridge turn sideways, the PCs might think twice about opening that giant green door.
5. **Reveal a new section of the dungeon.** The spiked pit might have an access tunnel so that bodies and valuables can be retrieved without a risky climb into the pit.
4. **Team it with other traps.** The trapped chest is a bit more interesting when it sits on the lap of a fire-breathing statue in a room where poison darts shoot from the wall.
3. **Give the PCs control.** The PCs reset the trap and trick their foe into stepping into it.
2. **Provide ways for every PC to contribute.** Maybe the wizard can make an Arcana check to reveal a panel hidden by an illusion. Perhaps the fighter can try to hold the trap open with a Strength check.
1. **Combine it with combat.** The room with pit traps is a lot more interesting if the PCs can push monsters in the pits.

For more advice about how to use traps, check out this article: **http://www.wizards.com/default.asp?x=dnd/ru20050810b** Although its traps are designed for the third edition of the game, much of the advice in the article remains useful.

Designing Your Own Traps

Think of all the advice below as guidelines rather than rules. Like many elements of 4th Edition design, a fair amount of art is mixed in with the science.

When setting out to design a trap for your game, consider basing it off the traps you already have available to you. If you're thinking about a gauntlet of shuriken-spitting statues for an 8th-level party, you can probably use either the spear gauntlet or poison dart wall from the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. Just use the trap as a base and replace the numbers for DCs, attack bonus, and damage using the tables below. That's going to be a lot easier and faster than designing from scratch.

You can also use the tables to raise or lower the level of a trap that you already have available. Maybe you like one of the traps in this article but its level is too high. Just consult the charts below and adjust it. If the existing trap doesn't match the numbers for its level in the charts, compare the numbers the trap has to the numbers the table has and then eyeball a proportional difference based on the numbers for the level you want.

You can even take a trap and "re-skin" it to your needs without changing any numbers. Perhaps you want to fill an area with deadly but random arcs of lightning. Take the pendulum scythes trap from the *Dungeon Master's Guide* and make it deal lightning damage instead of normal damage. Instead of slots, there are hidden lightning generators. Your players have what feels like a very new trap experience, and you didn't have to do a lot work.

If no existing trap serves your needs, you can design one using the tables below with other traps as your guide. When setting out to design a trap for an encounter, don't get hung up on whether it's a trap or hazard, or if it qualifies as a blaster, lurker, obstacle, or warder. These terms exist to provide mental cues that suggest the uses of traps. You already know how you want to use your trap.

Step 1: Choose the trap's level. This is probably the level of the PCs or the level of the adventure you're working on. The level determines the trap's numbers as described in the tables below. You can deviate from these numbers, but you should have good reason to do so. Your players aren't likely to realize small changes in difficulty (a point or two up or down), and noticeable changes in the numbers can cause the trap to become either too easy or too hard for the XP it provides, which likely translates to less fun at the table. If you look at the numbers and want the trap to be more dangerous, consider making a higher-level trap. When setting the DCs for disabling or delaying a trap using the Thievery skill, consider rudimentary traps, such as concealed pits or tripwire triggers, to be of moderate difficulty, while a more complex trap should use DCs appropriate for a hard challenge.

Step 2: Determine how the trap is a danger to the PCs. A trap that attacks once and is done should have different numbers than one of the same level that attacks multiple times. Similarly one that attacks a large area or many PCs functions very differently than one that endangers just one PC. Use one of the types below to suss out what numbers you should use.

Single-Shot Traps: Single-shot traps attack once and are done. A trap that resets might still be a single-shot trap if a PC must choose to do something active to set

it off. Being shot at as long as you stand in a square is not a single-shot trap because the PC could be paralyzed there or forced to fight in that square, but getting shot every time you open a specific door would qualify. Sure the trap resets whenever the door is closed, but the PC could leave it open or not use the door again.

Use the Limited Damage Expressions table. For a single target, use the medium damage. For an area assault, use the low damage numbers. For an elite, use the damage expression one step up (low turns to medium, medium turns to high).

Ongoing Attack Traps: These traps continually attack the PCs while they are in the area.

Use the Normal Damage Expressions table. For a single target, use the medium damage. For an area assault, use the low damage numbers. For an elite, use the damage expression one step up (low turns to medium, medium turns to high).

Area-Assault Traps: Both single-shot and ongoing-attack traps can be area assaults. Consider any trap that is likely to affect two or more PCs an area-assault trap and use the advice in the tables below to modify the numbers.

No-Damage Traps: Traps that deal no damage use all the other numbers in the tables below and somehow otherwise harm the PCs (blocking their movement, making them weakened or slowed, and so on). In a noncombat situation, a no-damage trap probably isn't much of a threat, but in a combat encounter, that trap can be just as tough to deal with as a monster. You're firmly in the realm of art when designing a no-damage trap, so don't be afraid to change the XP you give for it based on the difficulty of the encounter when you play.

Stress Traps: A stress trap is like a no-damage trap except that it threatens damage and might eventually follow through on that promise if the PCs fail to take the necessary actions. The room filling with water or with a slowly descending ceiling is a stress trap. This kind of trap might work better as a skill challenge, but consider the room-filling-with-water and compactor-room traps in this article. They both use statistics relevant for elite, ongoing-attack, area-assault traps of their level.

Step 3: When assigning XP for a trap, you need to know its level and type (single shot or ongoing, standard or elite). Single-shot traps should be considered minions. Ongoing and other traps should give the XP for standards or elites.

TRAP STATISTICS BY ROLE*

	Standard	Elite
Initiative bonus	+2	+4
Attack vs. AC**	Level + 5	Level + 7
Attack vs. other defenses**	Level + 3	Level + 5

*If you want to derive statistics such as defenses and AC, use the Damaging Objects section in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

**Reduce the attack bonus by 2 for powers that affect multiple creatures.

Elite and Solo Traps

You might want the trap to be an elite so that it takes up more space in an encounter, but it's probably a lot more fun to just add another trap. Don't fall prey to thinking that elite equates to more fun or danger. It can mean those things, but the trap the PCs fail to circumvent and that deals a lot of damage to them could just as easily be less fun than a standard trap. As for solo traps, it's better to think of them as skill challenges and design one of those. Your players might have a lot more fun engaging with the crazy trap that makes for a whole encounter than a surprise event that takes out one or more PCs.

If you want to make your trap elite, you're once again in the realm of art rather than science. Use the traps in this article and the *Dungeon Master's Guide* as examples. Options include increasing attack bonus by 2, increasing damage, increasing number of attacks, and increasing area. The Trap Statistics by Role table accounts for these changes except for increased damage and number of attacks.

TRAP DIFFICULTY CLASS AND DAMAGE BY LEVEL

DIFFICULTY CLASS (DC) VALUES				NORMAL DAMAGE EXPRESSIONS			LIMITED DAMAGE EXPRESSIONS		
Level	Easy	Moderate	Hard	Low	Medium	High	Low	Medium	High
1st-3rd	5	10	15	1d6 + 3	1d10 + 3	2d6 + 3	3d6 + 3	2d10 + 3	3d8 + 3
4th-6th	7	12	17	1d6 + 4	1d10 + 4	2d8 + 4	3d6 + 4	3d8 + 4	3d10 + 4
7th-9th	8	14	19	1d8 + 5	2d6 + 5	2d8 + 5	3d8 + 5	3d10 + 5	4d8 + 5
10th-12th	10	16	21	1d8 + 5	2d6 + 5	3d6 + 5	3d8 + 5	4d8 + 5	4d10 + 5
13th-15th	11	18	23	1d10 + 6	2d8 + 6	3d6 + 6	3d10 + 6	4d8 + 6	4d10 + 6
16th-18th	13	20	25	1d10 + 7	2d8 + 7	3d8 + 7	3d10 + 6	4d10 + 7	4d12 + 7
19th-21st	14	22	27	2d6 + 7	3d6 + 8	3d8 + 7	4d8 + 7	4d10 + 7	4d12 + 7
22nd-24th	16	24	29	2d6 + 8	3d6 + 8	4d6 + 8	4d8 + 8	4d12 + 8	5d10 + 8
25th-27th	17	26	31	2d8 + 9	3d8 + 9	4d6 + 9	4d10 + 9	5d10 + 9	5d12 + 9
28th-30th	19	28	33	2d8 + 10	3d8 + 10	4d8 + 10	4d10 + 9	5d10 + 9	5d12 + 9

Experience Point Awards

Level	Standard	Minion	Elite
1	100	25	200
2	125	31	250
3	150	38	300
4	175	44	350
5	200	50	400
6	250	63	500
7	300	75	600
8	350	88	700
9	400	100	800
10	500	125	1,000
11	600	150	1,200
12	700	175	1,400
13	800	200	1,600
14	1,000	250	2,000
15	1,200	300	2,400
16	1,400	350	2,800
17	1,600	400	3,200
18	2,000	500	4,000
19	2,400	600	4,800
20	2,800	700	5,600
21	3,200	800	6,400
22	4,150	1,038	8,300
23	5,100	1,275	10,200
24	6,050	1,513	12,100
25	7,000	1,750	14,000
26	9,000	2,250	18,000
27	11,000	2,750	22,000
28	13,000	3,250	26,000
29	15,000	3,750	30,000
30	19,000	4,750	38,000
31	23,000	5,750	46,000
32	27,000	6,750	54,000
33	31,000	7,750	62,000
34	39,000	9,750	78,000
35	47,000	11,750	94,000
36	55,000	13,750	110,000
37	63,000	15,750	126,000
38	79,000	19,750	158,000
39	95,000	23,750	190,000
40	111,000	27,750	222,000

Example Traps

The following traps were created using the guidelines above. Each has an Encounter Uses section that offers some ideas to make the trap more fun.

Kissing Maiden Level 4 Lurker
Trap XP 44

When a square is entered, a section of floor slides aside and a stone post levers up to hit the creature in the square, pushing it back. The stone post then swings back down to reset the trap as long as the square is empty.

Trap: A square hides a post that deals damage and pushes a PC. The post provides cover while the creature is in the square.

Perception
- ✦DC 12: The square has a portion that slides aside.
- ✦DC 17: A portion of the floor sinks when pressed on. It might be a trapdoor or pressure plate.

Trigger
The post swings up when a creature enters the square.

Attack
Opportunity Action **Melee**
Target: The creature that triggered the trap.
Attack: +7 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 1d10 + 4 damage, and the target is pushed 2 squares in the direction the trap is set to push.

Countermeasures
- ✦A character standing in the square of a triggered kissing maiden that missed can keep it from resetting by jamming an object in the way of the post or the sliding section of floor that hid the post, requiring a DC 12 Thievery check.
- ✦An adjacent character can delay or disable a kissing maiden with a DC 17 Thievery check.

Encounter Uses
- ✦Pair kissing maidens with other area triggered traps, such that a pushed PC lands in another trapped square.
- ✦Pair kissing maidens with giant steps that the PCs have to climb and enemies that cling to the walls rather than the floor. Imagine a titan stairway shrouded in spider webs with PCs getting knocked back down a step after climbing up or getting a softer landing in an immobilizing spider's web. Deathjump spiders work great for PCs of about 4th level.
- ✦Place several kissing maidens around a room and team them with creatures that don't trigger them, such as flying creatures with hover.
- ✦Put several kissing maidens in an area with enemies that can push the PCs into the triggering squares, such as a dwarf hammerer.

Falling Iron Portcullis Level 7 Obstacle
Trap XP 75

When a pressure plate is stepped on, a hidden iron portcullis drops from the ceiling into the center of 2 squares, blocking the hallway.

Trap: A portcullis drops into 2 adjacent squares when a 2-square wide pressure plate is stepped on. A secret panel hides the winch that raises the portcullis.

Perception
- ✦DC 14: The ceiling has a 2-inch wide slot packed with gray dirt and small stones. It's clearly meant to camouflage something.
- ✦DC 19: A portion of the floor sinks when pressed. It might be a trapdoor or pressure plate.
- ✦DC 14: A secret panel in the wall beyond the pressure plate hides the winch that raises the portcullis.

Trigger
A portcullis falls when a creature steps on a pressure plate, blocking the passage.

Attack
Immediate Reaction **Area** 2 adjacent squares
Targets: Creatures in affected squares.
Attack: +10 vs. Reflex
Hit: 3d10 + 5 damage, and the target is immobilized and knocked prone until escape.
Miss: Half damage and slide 1 (roll a d20: 1-10 slide forward, 11-20 slide back).

Countermeasures
- ✦A character who has found the winch can crank it up with a DC 8 Athletics check.
- ✦An adjacent character can delay or disable one portcullis or pressure plate with a DC 19 Thievery check.
- ✦Immobilized characters can use the escape action against DC 14 to free themselves, moving 1 square but still prone.
- ✦A character not immobilized by the portcullis can force it open with a successful DC 19 Strength check.

✦A character can attack a portcullis bar (AC/Reflex 8, Fortitude 8, hp 45). Destroying a bar grants enough room for a Small or Medium creature to squeeze through with the escape action against DC 14. Destroying two bars allows a Large creature to squeeze through (DC 19), and Small and Medium count the square as difficult terrain.

Encounter Uses

✦Place the pressure plate a few squares after the portcullis so that it's likely to divide the party. Then have the fall of the gate summon the guards, release undead from the walls, or otherwise start a combat encounter. You can hit the PCs from both sides or attack one group while the other struggles to move through the portcullis.

✦Use a portcullis falling ahead of the PCs to direct their travel. If they're exploring, the falling trap attracts them like a moth to a flame. If they're running from an enemy, the trap redirects their travel to an easier route.

✦Use several of the traps in an area with creatures that aren't hindered by them, such as monsters with phasing.

Water-Filling Chamber — Level 8 Blaster
Trap — XP 350

When a character moves onto a central square in the room, reinforced iron doors crash down over the exits, and a face carved in the wall opens its jaws to spew water into the room. Each iron door can be opened as a safeguard against accidental entrapment, but each door release has three locks.

Trap: The chamber seals off and fills with water when a pressure plate is stepped upon.

Perception

✦DC 14: The face carved in the stone walls looks like it has a movable jaw.

✦DC 19: A portion of the floor sinks when pressed on. It might be a trapdoor or pressure plate.

✦DC 14: There's a hidden slot above each door. Something might fall out of it.

Initiative +2

Trigger

The trap is triggered when a creature enters the trapped square, typically in the center of the room. When triggered, the iron doors fall into place. Roll initiative. On the trap's initiative, the water begins to pour from the faces in the walls.

Attack

Standard Action **Area** the whole room

Targets: On the trap's initiative, the water level in the room rises. Raising the water has the following effects each round.

Round 1—No effect on Medium creatures. The room is considered difficult terrain for Small creatures.

Round 2—The room is difficult terrain for Medium creatures. Small creatures must swim.

Round 3—All creatures must swim.

Round 4—The room is fully filled with water. All creatures are considered to be swimming underwater.

Countermeasures

✦An adjacent character can delay the trigger with a DC 14 Thievery check.

✦An adjacent character can disable a falling iron door with a DC 19 Thievery check. This causes the room to fill with water in twice as many rounds, using the round 1 result on round 2, the round 2 result on round 4, and so on.

✦An adjacent character can use a key to open one of the three locks on the iron door, assuming they have the right key.

✦An adjacent character can open a lock on an iron door with a DC 19 Thievery check.

✦An adjacent character can stem the flow of water into the room for 1 round by holding a carving's mouth shut with a DC 14 Strength check. For each round that the mouth is held closed, water still flows in but at a slower rate. For each round that the mouth is held closed, the water does not rise. For every 3 rounds of being closed that accumulates, the water raises one level as though a round passed.

✦An adjacent character can attempt to break down a reinforced iron door with a DC 24 Strength check.

✦An adjacent character can attack a reinforced iron door to break it open (AC 5; Fortitude 10; Reflex 5; hp 80).

Encounter Uses

✦Don't worry too much about the physics here. This is about a cool scene, not the minutia of water pressure and cubic volume.

✦You can alter this trap's difficulty by adding more locks to the door, shortening the rounds until the room fills, or adding more water-spewing faces that need to be held up to delay the PCs' watery doom.

✦Add some monsters! Sharks could be neat, but given the level of this trap, sahuagin make a great choice. Distracting the PCs from the means of escape makes the rising water more frightening.

✦Think about this room in dungeon design. Where does the water come from? Perhaps the PCs have another battle in a room with a huge pool that is set somewhere above the water-filling chamber.

Crushing Walls Room — Level 11 Blaster
Trap — XP 600

When a character moves onto a central square in the room, reinforced iron doors crash down over the exits and two opposite walls begin to press inward. Each iron door can be opened as a safeguard against accidental entrapment, but each door release has three locks.

Trap: A square is a pressure plate that makes the walls press together.

Perception

✦DC 16: Slight scratches in the floor and ceiling make it look like the walls can move inward.

✦DC 21: A portion of the floor sinks when pressed on. It might be a trapdoor or pressure plate.

✦DC 21: There's a hidden slot above each door. Something might fall out of it.

Initiative +2 **Speed** 1 (consider altering this based on the size of the room)

Trigger

The trap is triggered when a creature enters the trapped square, typically in the center of the room. When triggered, the iron doors fall into place. Roll initiative. On the trap's initiative, the walls move inward.

Attack

Standard Area the whole room

Targets: Each turn, each wall moves inward 1 square. Creatures adjacent to the wall are automatically pushed 1. When the crushing walls are 1 square apart, they attack all creatures in the room until all are crushed to death and the walls press together.

Attack: +14 vs. Fortitude

Hit: 3d6 + 5 damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).

Miss: Half damage.

Countermeasures

✦An adjacent character can delay or disable the trigger with a DC 19 Thievery check.

✦An adjacent character can disable a falling iron door with a DC 21 Thievery check.

- ✦An adjacent character can use a key to open one of the three locks on the iron door, assuming they have the right key.
- ✦An adjacent character can open a lock on an iron door with a DC 21 Thievery check.
- ✦An adjacent character can prevent a wall's inward movement with a DC 23 Strength check. If the walls are 1 square apart, the DC increases to 30. Characters can aid.
- ✦An adjacent character can attempt to break down a reinforced iron door with a DC 30 Strength check.
- ✦An adjacent character can attack a reinforced iron door to break it open (AC 5; Fortitude 10; Reflex 5; hp 80).

Encounter Uses

- ✦The danger of this trap depends on the size of the room and the speed of the walls. If you want to be sure of how it might work out, make a copy of the PCs' character sheets and do a test run. That way you can be sure your version of this encounter is dangerous and fun before you run it.
- ✦Change the trigger to something active. Maybe an NPC outside the room pulls a lever. This becomes even more interesting if the NPC is still engaged in the fight. Maybe the room has very high walls but an open top. Then the villain and henchmen can watch from above and attack the PCs. This also gives the PCs the option of trying to move out of the trap by going up.
- ✦Pit the PCs against this trap and something with phasing. Trap haunts and wailing ghosts are appropriate to the trap's level. The phasing creatures move in and out from behind the crushing walls, taking advantage of the space behind the walls for refuge from attacks.
- ✦Turn this room on its side and you have a crushing ceiling trap. If you want to make it interesting, combine it with the electrified floor trap from the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, but instead of electricity, think of the dangerous squares as squares of ceiling jabbing down spikes at random.

Giant Rolling Boulder Level 14 Blaster
Trap XP 250

When triggered, a huge rolling boulder as wide as the passageway is released and crashes through a false wall. It begins rolling down the hall, crushing everything in its path.

Trap: A trigger you define releases a distant boulder that begins rolling toward the trigger area, and it rolls until stopped.

Perception

- ✦DC 23: A check of this result allows a PC to realize that the trigger is in tension and that setting it off releases something.
- ✦DC 18: A PC near the distant false wall can determine that it is thin and that a large space is behind it.

Initiative +2 **Speed** 8 (consider altering this based on the length of the roll and the PCs' speeds)

Trigger

You decide the trigger. It might be an NPC pulling on a lever, a PC pressing the wrong button, or taking the gem from a statue's eye. When triggered, roll initiative. On its initiative, the boulder moves.

Attack

Standard Action **Area** trample attack in squares entered by the boulder

Trample: Each turn, the boulder moves its speed and enters enemies' spaces. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks. The boulder can end its move in an occupied space. Creatures in the boulder's space at the start of their turn have cover and can act normally. When it enters an enemy's space, the boulder makes a trample attack. If a creature enters a square of the boulder's space, it makes a free trample attack.

Trample Attack: +17 vs. Reflex
Hit: 3d10 + 6 damage, and the target is knocked prone.
Miss: Half damage, and the target is not knocked prone.

Countermeasures

- ✦A character adjacent to the rolling boulder can stop it with a DC 25 Athletics check. This provokes a trample attack, and the character's Athletics check fails if the boulder's trample attack hits.
- ✦An adjacent character can delay the trigger with a DC 23 Thievery check.
- ✦An adjacent character can disable the boulder with a DC 23 Thievery check. The character must have broken through the false wall first (AC 4; Fortitude 12; Reflex 4; hp 30).

Encounter Uses

- ✦Put the boulder trap in a long hallway with the PCs in the middle and enemies strewn throughout. That way the PCs (and their enemies!) have to make choices between fighting or running from the boulder. This is particularly effective if you put some minions in front of the boulder early on. The players are sure to sit up and pay attention after seeing it mulch some monsters.
- ✦Consider how the boulder stops. Does it come crashing to a halt against constructed stops, smash through a wall into a heretofore unknown room, roll up a ramp and come rolling back, or go careening off a cliff to slam into structures far below?
- ✦Put several boulder traps with ramps that send them back in a large open room. The PCs and their enemies can then try to use the pattern of the boulders' movement to their advantage, and the battlefield moves a lot as creatures use part of their turns to leap out of the way.

About the Author

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FORGOTTEN REALMS®

Rose Keep

A Red Wizard Enclave

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When one speaks of Red Wizards, one is most likely referring to merchants who specialize in scrolls, magic items, and sometimes, illicit substances and questionable trade goods.

The average Red Wizard enclave exists as small mercantile manor or trading compound within the walls of a city large enough to support even minuscule magical trade. Customers usually interact with Red Wizards (or their agents) on the enclave's grounds. Red Wizard enclaves are in many of the major coastal cities of the Sea of Fallen Stars, as well as in the Moonsea region.

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History DC 15: A century ago, the most powerful Red Wizards numbered among the magocratic leaders of Thay. At that time, Thay supported several embassylike trading enclaves spread across dozens of cities around the Sea of Fallen Stars. Each enclave enjoyed ambassadorial status and served as an outlying arm of Thay. A given enclave was treated as if Thayan soil, which meant that the Red Wizards within enjoyed immunity from local laws and tariffs. At the same time, enclaves sold a variety of magic (and sometimes banned) wares.

However all that changed when one devious Red Wizard rose up and seized power back in the homeland for his own necromantic ends. Red Wizards within Thay who pledged themselves to Szass Tam survived. The rest who opposed Szass Tam died, some in the initial rebellion, and others when they joined the last few rebel zulkirs to stop Szass Tam just a few years ago. Those Red Wizards who did not return to Thay to aid their newly declared sovereign were declared outcasts and were marked for death if they or their descendants ever return.

Streetwise DC 20: Some whisper Red Wizards yet enjoy the protection of Thay, but that assertion doesn't appear to be born out by the evidence. Thus most folks equate "Red Wizard" with magic merchants, not agents of Thay as old civil documents describe it. People sometimes refer to Red Wizards as if part of an organization, but that word implies a stronger connection between enclaves than usually exists.

That said, most enclaves enjoy a sort of loose affiliation between their scattered compounds. On occasion, one or more throw in together to charter a trade ship to move especially valuable cargo between their locations across the Sea of Fallen Stars.

Red Wizard Organization

What was once a tightly controlled network of Red Wizard embassy-enclaves is now a loosely connected but ultimately independent scattering of merchant houses. They yet call themselves Red Wizards, and indeed, many of the principles in a given enclave are indeed arcanists, though not all. Each enclave answers only to itself, and it determines its own policies and procedures. Some enclaves pass controlling interest down through family bloodlines, but others are open to outsiders purchasing controlling rights in the enterprise if the price is right.

Once every two years, a Red Wizard or two from each enclave travels to meet at a convention of peers. This gathering is usually hosted by one of the larger enclaves and is kept secret from those not among the Red Wizards, not necessarily because they don't intend to do anything illicit, but because they seek a trade advantage over other local merchants.

Headquarters: None.

Hierarchy: None between enclaves; within a given enclave executive power is sometimes concentrated in one individual's hands, while at other times the policies of the enclave are shared among a small group of Red Wizards.

Members: The Red Wizards only rarely recruit new Red Wizards to join a particular enclave, though they do hire local labor and talent for a wide variety of services. Sometimes new members come into the fold through marriage, other times through adoption, but most often, a new Red Wizard is born, and upon reaching his or her majority, decides to stay instead of seeking fortune beyond the enclave's walls.

Locations: Within the lands bordering the Inner Sea, enclaves can be found in nearly every capitol city, including recently founded compounds in Airspur and Tymanther. Enclaves that once existed in smaller cities are mostly gone, though a handful still persists.

The average enclave supports hired guards and other staff, including servants, assistants, and so on, as well as the Red Wizards themselves, numbering from two to ten, depending on the enclave's size. Some Red Wizards live in the enclave, while others maintain grand homes beyond the enclave's walls.

Rose Keep

The trading compound locally known as Rose Keep is one of the smaller enclaves still extant. However, despite their small size, this Red Wizard enclave keeps its hand in local politics, gossip, and trade as ably as any merchant concern or noble house in the city. Those seeking magic items locally know the Red Wizards produce quality items. Those seeking goods of a particularly outré nature also know that sometimes, Rose Keep has just the thing.

History DC 20: Rose Keep was one of the last enclaves Thay officially sanctioned prior to Szass Tam's necromantic coup. Left to its own devices even before the compound had fully gained the trust of the local governing bodies, the enclave nearly failed. This near failure teetered even closer to realization when two of the four Red Wizards staffing the compound left to pursue their own interests, or in the case of the cruel-hearted Levant, returned to Thay to pledge himself to Szass Tam's service.

The remaining Red Wizard was Dhenna Shavres, who was left not only with the Enclave to manage, but also a newborn daughter named Tharna (possibly of Levant's get). Despite her trials, Dhenna kept Rose Keep a going concern even without the advantages of ambassadorial status, save for an interregnum immediately after the Spellplague.

Dhenna Shavres finally passed away thirty years ago, leaving the enclave in Tharna's capable hands. Tharna spent a little more than two decades as the solitary Red Wizard of Rose Keep. She was known

both for her canny grasp of magic and coin. About five years ago she sought out partners, apparently because of her own advancing age and a desire to see Rose Keep persist if she passed away.

Tharna Shavres finally accepted buy-in offers from two others: a human male named Vanargen the Astronomer, and a dwarf male called Dorim Cragwatcher.

History DC 25: Tharna had a son named Kalarel, but he has not been seen in the compound for decades. Apparently Tharna and Kalarel had a nasty falling-out over a cursed magic item—a sort of portal mouth. Tharna wanted it destroyed, but Kalarel wanted it for himself. He said it provided him with unique insights on the true nature of death. Tharna finally expelled Kalarel to an unknown fate. Unknown to most, Tharna chose a new heir, a girl living in the city, who upon reaching her majority in another 5 years, will succeed Tharna in the governance of Rose Keep. Tharna has kept the identity of her heir a close-guarded secret.

Streetwise DC 15: The canny Tharna Shavres still holds a majority share over Rose Keep, and she remains a sharp negotiator even well into her ninth decade. Dorim and Vanargen support and advise Tharna, keeping a careful eye out for new business possibilities.

Location of Rose Keep

Rose Keep could be located in any number of cities, towns, or perhaps even large villages. Its size and self-contained nature don't rely too heavily on external services for it to function. If you are running a Forgotten Realms campaign, Rose Keep is presumably located in any of the cities with ports along the Sea of Fallen Stars. For purposes of official game and novel continuity, Rose Keep is sited in the city of Veltalar in Aglarond.

Streetwise DC 20: Vanargen is a cipher; not even his fellow Red Wizards know which way he'll jump next. Dorim seems good-humored, but stories circulate that the dwarf conceals a murderous rage beneath his jovial façade. Dorim has the most dealings beyond the compound and is sometimes gone for weeks at a time arranging deals.

Adventure in Rose Keep

Adventurers might enter Rose Keep for a variety of reasons.

Hook: Regular Business

Player characters who wish to deal in magic items or other particularly rare items easily discover Rose Keep. It's rare in most places to find a shop or a bazaar that routinely sells anything but the lowest-level available magic items. While Rose Keep does the majority of its business in such low-level palliatives, it also has a limited capacity to deliver higher-level items to rich collectors and the odd adventuring company. The courtyard gates are thrown open five out of every tenday, and a tent is raised in the courtyard for those with everyday needs for level 1 to 3 items. For higher-level items and other goods, an appointment must be made with one of the Red Wizards (the courtyard tent bazaar is staffed by employees; see area 1 of the keyed map). The person the PCs end up making a deal with is frequently the luck of the draw. You can use your own discretion to determine if an item a PC wishes to buy can be found at Rose Keep; for items PCs wish to sell, you can decide whether you think the Red Wizards are at all interested in it.

Hook: Irregular Business

The player characters are approached by one Fasaria Laytharan, a noble whose family sits on the governing council of the city (the Grand Council, if Rose Keep is located in New Sarshel). Fasaria indicates she wishes to employ the adventuring party as spies. She believes the Red Wizards of the enclave are in cahoots with local thieves, and she thinks they are acting as a fence by reselling their ill-gotten gains as if it were merchandise purchased from other enclaves along the Sea of Fallen Stars.

In truth Fasaria has no such belief—she secretly wants to send the PCs into Rose Enclave to, at minimum, disrupt the business operations of Rose Keep, or better yet, eliminate one more of the Red Wizards; adventurers are wont to swing swords first and ask questions afterward, in Fasaria's experience. House Laytharan secretly backs a black market slave ring, and according to her contacts, the Red Wizard named Dorim Cragwatcher has been making inquiries into the business. She'd rather avoid the competition without making it appear as if she has anything to do with the matter, and even if it does come to everyone's attention that she sent the PCs into Rose Keep, well, she did so only because she thought the enclave concealed a fence.

Hook: The Implements of Dulaphras

From time to time, every dealer in magic items gains possession of a cursed ring or mask only an undead wearer could love. This can occur accidentally, such as when a buyer fails to fully identify all the item's properties. It can also be a purposeful decision, depending on the dealer. Rose Keep is no different. It turns out that several items purchased by Kalarel, Tharna's missing son, were just these sorts of items. Fearing the bad publicity Rose Keep could garner if others learned that the enclave dealt with cursed magic, Tharna had the items relegated to permanent storage in the cellars beneath Rose Keep, along with other questionable materials and "goods."

However, two items in particular now stored under Rose Keep were the cherished possessions of a supposedly long-dead cambion named Dulaphras. These items include the *ring of fury* and the *belt of fiends*. And now, Dulaphras wants them back. The

cambion has assembled a force of devils and waits only for the dark of the moon to launch an attack to retrieve its implements.

Tharna has learned of Dulaphras's planned attack, and she attempts to hire the PCs to defend her compound against the devil's attack on the dark of the moon. Unfortunately for Tharna, Dorim is secretly in league with Dulaphras, while Vanargen could throw in with either Tharna or Dorim, depending on how well or poorly the PCs appear to be defending Rose Keep from the incursion.

Red Wizards of Rose Keep

The following NPCs can be encountered in or have ties to Rose Keep.

Tharna Shavres, Red Wizard

This elderly woman is gaunt with age, but her white hair remains full and is pulled back into a long braid. She is adorned with a variety of charms and amulets, wields an impressive staff, and wears a complex layering of red cloaks that appear to move and swirl of their own accord.

Personality Traits: Tharna is dry and to the point, but she is cruel only to fools and those who've proven themselves to be her enemy. She enjoys her daily glass of wine with her evening meal and asks visitors if they've "sampled any interesting vintages of late." Tharna looks for wines both for her own cellar, as well as for sale abroad.

Motivation: Tharna wants what is best for the enclave; she sees it as her only true legacy in the world.

Information: Tharna, having run a trade compound in the city for over thirty years, knows much on many topics. She might relate the following bits to interested, diplomatic PCs, if circumstances are appropriate.

History of the Keep: Tharna knows the general information described earlier in the article in all the History and Streetwise entries for Rose Keep in particular and Red Wizards in general.

Dorim Cragwatcher: The mistress of the enclave has begun to doubt her decision to allow Dorim to buy his way into a limited partnership in the trade enclave. Tharna suspects Dorim might be pursuing activities that could endanger the enclave, but so far she doesn't have any evidence to back up her suspicions. If she did have such evidence, she would act.

Vanargen: This wizard is a cipher. A brilliant merchant, but odd. Tharna and Vanargen rarely talk, but Tharna believes Vanargen would never do anything against the interest of the enclave.

Thieves' Fence: Tharna finds the possibility that her enclave is somehow being used to resell stolen goods (see the Irregular Business hook) ludicrous, unless the PCs mention the possibility that Dorim might somehow be involved, in which case she considers the possibility.

Implements of Dulaphras: If PCs know of these cursed items and urge Tharna to destroy them, she resists, indicating that each item contains the spirit of a devil that would be released back into the world to do evil. She has yet to tell Dorim or Vanargen of the

implements, which she has secreted away in the altar in room 25.

Special: Tharna controls a shield guardian (level 14 soldier; *Monster Manual* page 149), a gift given to her by her deceased mother. The guardian is never far from Tharna, and it is an effective bodyguard. The amulet to control the guardian is keyed to Tharna and doesn't work in another creature's hands.

Tharna Shavres, NPC Wizard **Level 9 Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 400

Initiative +4 **Senses** Perception +11
HP 72; **Bloodied** 36
AC 21; **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 23
Speed 6

⊕ **Quarterstaff** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic, Weapon**
+14 vs. AC; 1d8 damage.

Magic Missile (standard; at-will) ✦ **Force**
Ranged 20; +14 vs. Reflex; 4d4 + 4 force damage.

Lightning Bolt (standard; recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞) ✦ **Lightning**
Ranged 10; +12 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 4 lightning, and two creatures within 10 squares of the target are attacked as well; on a hit, the secondary targets take 1d6 +6 lightning damage.

Lightning Serpent (standard; daily) ✦ **Lightning, Poison**
Ranged 10; +16 vs. Reflex; 2d12 + 4 lightning damage, and target takes ongoing 5 poison damage and is slowed (save ends both). *Miss:* Half damage, target slowed (save ends), and no ongoing damage.

Dimension Door (move, daily) ✦ **Teleportation**
Tharna; teleports 10 squares.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Draconic
Skills Arcana +13, Insight +11
Str 10 (+4) **Dex** 11 (+4) **Wis** 14 (+6)
Con 12 (+5) **Int** 19 (+8) **Cha** 16 (+7)
Equipment *staff of storms* +2, spellbook

Dorim Cragwatcher, Red Wizard

This regal-looking dwarf wears a grand robe of scarlet under a striking blue cloak. His beard is clasped in arcane strictures, and a great winged bat perches on his shoulder as if a pet bird of prey.

Personality Traits: Dorim appears jovial and fond of boisterous talk and easy praise. He calls even those he doesn't know well, "my friend," and tries to put at ease anyone he deals with even for a few moments. However, if anyone attempts an Insight check and beats Dorim's opposed Bluff check, they feel certain Dorim merely plays a grand façade, possibly to facilitate business.

Dorim Cragwatcher, NPC Wizard **Level 7 Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid, dwarf XP 300

Initiative +3 **Senses** Perception +4; low-light vision
HP 62; **Bloodied** 31
AC 16; **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 21
Speed 5

⊕ **Bat Bite** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
+12 vs. AC; 1d8 + 4 poison damage.

Fire Shroud (standard; recharge ⁞⁞) ✦ **Fire**
Close burst 3; +12 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 3 fire damage, and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).

Sleep (standard; daily) ✦ **Sleep**
Area burst 2 within 20 squares; +12 vs. Will; the target is slowed (save ends). First Failed Saving Throw: The target becomes unconscious (save ends).

False Life (minor; when bloodied; daily)
Conferred by amulet of false life; Dorim gains 14 temporary hit points.

Disguise Self (minor; daily) ✦ **Illusion**
Personal; Dorim takes on the appearance of another humanoid creature of the same size previously seen; the illusion lasts for 1 hour. Anyone attempting to see through the disguise makes a DC 28 Insight check to succeed.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Abyssal
Skills Arcana + 14, Bluff + 13
Str 11 (+3) **Dex** 11 (+3) **Wis** 12 (+4)
Con 14 (+5) **Int** 16 (+6) **Cha** 14 (+5)
Equipment *amulet of false life* +2, spellbook

Motivation: Dorim wants to accumulate as much power and wealth for himself as possible, and eventually, he wants to succeed Tharna, possibly sooner than might naturally occur.

Information: Dorim is juggling several side-projects, few of them legal, and none of which he is willing to discuss. He divulges a little on the following topics.

Tharna Shavres: Dorim indicates his respect for Tharna, while at the same time jokingly reflecting her advancing age might be making her less able to lead the enclave to the profits it deserves. He jokes along these lines as long as PCs go along, but backtracks if they try to pin him down to a clear-cut statement regarding Tharna's competency.

Dorim Cragwatcher: If asked about himself, Dorim explains how lucky he is to have gained such a position of responsibility and respect. He does not divulge any personal history.

Vanargen: Dorim shrugs off Vanargen's importance, but he indicates the mage "might have his uses." In truth, if Dorim ever makes a play for control of the enclave, he is confident he can persuade the disaffected warlock to follow his lead.

Thieves' Fence: Dorim laughs long and hard at the possibility that the enclave might be working with local thieves. Still, he doesn't allow PCs into the cellars, for fear they might find evidence of his nascent slaving.

Implements of Dulaphras: Dorim doesn't know anything about the possibility that these are held in the cellar, and he is interested to learn anything the PCs wish to tell him regarding it.

Vanargen the Astronomer, Red Wizard

This gaunt-looking human male wears a red leather great-coat without sleeves. The man's arms are tattooed with stars and strange constellations.

Personality Traits: This Red Wizard (whose magic comes by way of a star pact instead of through study) likes to stare into the far distance for minutes at a time, apparently unaware of his surroundings, even during the middle of a conversation. He appears easily distracted, and every so often for no apparent reason mutters, "By Caiphon's mad dreams, I am so close to understanding it all . . ."

Motivation: Mainly, Vanargen wants to go about his business with as little effort as possible so that, once he has dispensed with his merchant duties by day, he can retire to his observatory on the top of the main tower at night and gaze at his beloved stars. Thus, he is likely to do whatever is expedient in a given situation, not what is moral. That said, Vanargen is susceptible to persuasion, at least in the short term.

Information: It's hard to coax much real information out of Vanargen. He answers questions with "Hmmm. . . ." Then he lapses into a staring contest with the ceiling. He does have a few things to say in response to the following topics.

Tharna Shavres: "I think she's got several years of life in her. The old gal is plucky."

Astronomer? "The stars are wondrous. I've learned much in their study. Some of them even talk to me."

Dorim: "The dwarf is a sly one. But he does get things done."

Vanargen, NPC Warlock	**Level 8 Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid, human	XP 350
Initiative +7 **Senses** Perception +5	
HP 87; **Bloodied** 43	
AC 21; **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 21	
Speed 6	
Eldritch Blast (standard; at-will)	
+11 vs. AC; 1d10 + 4 damage.	
Rending Fear of Khirad (standard; daily) ✦ **Charm, Fear**	
+13 vs. Will; automatically hits a helpless target; target with a shared language answers one question to the best of its knowledge. Each round, Vanargen can ask one new question, up to 5 questions.	
Warlock's Curse (minor; at-will)	
Ranged sight, nearest enemy; the target is cursed. A cursed target takes 1d6 extra damage anytime Vanargen deals damage with a power.	
Far Realm Phantasm (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Fear, Psychic**	
Ranged 10; +11 vs. Will; 1d6 + 4 psychic damage, and the target loses its standard action on its next turn and takes a -2 penalty to Will defense (save ends).	
Fury of Gibbeth (standard; daily) ✦ **Fear, Force**	
Ranged 10; +11 vs. Reflex; 3d10 + 3 force damage, and the target is knocked prone.	
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Deep Speech, Common	
Skills Arcana +12, History +12	
Str 10 (+4) **Dex** 12 (+5) **Wis** 12 (+5)	
Con 15 (+6) **Int** 16 (+7) **Cha** 18 (+8)	
Equipment *rod of dark reward +2*	

Features of Rose Keep

The trade compound consists of a walled enclave holding a courtyard, a two-story reinforced building with an attached three-story tower, and an underground cellar accessible only by magic (or a determined burrowing effort).

The top of the tower has traditional battlements, but it holds an observatory of sorts.

Walls

The scuffed red outer walls are made of 3-foot-thick mortared stone (DC 25 climb; spikes at the top of the wall make a moderately hard climb far more difficult). Inner walls are 1-foot-thick mortared stone.

Doors

The outer doors are made of iron-reinforced oak. They are unlocked and opened by turning a winch mechanism in the courtyard (DC 22 Strength check to break). The enclave's smaller interior doors are made of strong wood with iron hinges and fittings (DC 16 Strength check to break). Some might be locked as noted under a particular room description.

Entering Rose Keep

The main gates are open five out of ten days during daylight hours, at which time anyone is free to walk into the courtyard (area 1) and interact with the NPCs present there.

Gaining entry at other times requires either an appointment or a DC 14 Stealth check to sneak in without alerting the hired sentries that keep watch on the courtyard at all hours (an eladrin captain and several human guards). If the PCs attempt to sneak in but are discovered, it takes only about 1d4 rounds for all the NPCs within the above-ground sections of the compound to respond to aid the embattled guards and captain.

1. Courtyard

When Rose Enclave is open for business, the courtyard is crowded:

A large red tent squats in the center of the courtyard. Its drawn flaps reveal a large wooden table on which glass vials, scroll cases, and other oddments are gathered. A woman in a red caftan minds the table. Outside the tent, several human guards and their eladrin captain watch the proceedings.

A self-styled "mage apprentice" named Zabithia minds the tent bazaar (human mage level 4 artillery; *Monster Manual* page 163). Zabithia is motivated to serve the Red Wizards who hired her because she hopes that, in addition to her generous pay, they will continue to school her in the arcane arts.

The eladrin fey knight Cryannar (level 7 soldier leader; *Monster Manual* page 102) walks the courtyard on an irregular schedule. Cryannar owes Tharna a great debt about which he does not speak, but which has so far assured his loyalty. Cryannar commands a bevy of ten human guards (level 3 soldier; *Monster Manual* page 162), only five of which are on guard at any one time. The remainder of the human guards is usually in the small barracks in room 6. If Cryannar or one of the guards cries an alarm, all the guards and the Red Wizards on the premises respond, as does Tharna's shield guardian (level 14 soldier; *Monster Manual* page 149).

2. Stables

The wizards don't keep mounts, but shipments from the port sometimes arrive by horse-drawn cart. The beasts of burden are stabled here and are looked after by Mershin the stable boy, who loves horses more than magic.

3. General Storage

This glorified shed is secured by a locked iron-shod door (DC 20 Thievery check to unlock, DC 23 Strength check to break). This space is used to store the courtyard tent when not in use, as well as extra water, hard tack, grain, unmixed mortar for repairs, and other maintenance oddments. On odd days when the enclave is not open for business, 1d4+1 hired workers under the command of female dwarf crew boss named Bartha (who keeps the key to this chamber) are on site to do structural and grounds upkeep.

Buying and Selling Magic

Magic items of level 1-3 are routinely sold in the courtyard bazaar of Rose Keep, though only a few level 1 items are on display (vials, rods, wands, and ritual scrolls) whose total value doesn't exceed 2,000 gp. However, those interested in finding a particular item of up to level 9 have only to name it, and within the day, the item is procured.

If PCs wish to buy or sell a higher-level item, or some other rare good they believe the Red Wizards can supply, they can request a meeting with a Red Wizard, and they can expect an appointment to be granted within 1d4 days, or sooner for particularly diplomatic PCs. Buying and selling higher-level magic items requires transactions between other Red Wizard enclaves, so getting a particular item can take up to 1d10 + 10 days.

4. Well House

This roughly mortared structure is obviously older than the walls and keep. Worn steps lead down to an oak door, behind which is a damp chamber that holds a basin of deep, clear water. This is the enclave's water supply.

5. Entry Hall

The doors to the entry hall are strong wood with iron hinges and fittings (DC 16 Strength check to break), and it is locked at night and when the enclave is not open for business (DC 23 Thievery check to unlock).

The chamber is high, and in fact the central portion of the ceiling rises up into the second story of the tower (room 17).

Besides being the only obvious entry to the keep, this chamber is where one or more of the three principle Red Wizards receives visitors and holds conferences. Visitors who meet with Vanargen sometimes discover the wizard can't be bothered to come down to the ground floor, but he instead calls down his conversation from the balcony of room 17 above.

6. Barracks

Five off-duty human guards (level 3 soldier; *Monster Manual* page 162) under Cryannar's command rest here between shifts in comfortable if sparse cots.

7. Servants Quarters

A general staff of five servants keep their quarters here, all of whom answer to Head Housekeeper Janson Pleth, a tiefling whose greatest fear is to see a soiled linen or an unwashed platter in the kitchen.

8. Minor Hall

Sometimes the Red Wizards and guests take their meals in this nicely appointed chamber, which is cool in the summer and warmed by a large fireplace in the winter. The fireplace chimney is large, but stopped at regular intervals by iron grating mortared into the chimney's structure.

9. Kitchen

Meals for all staff are daily prepared here, which keeps two of the five servants of room 7 busy all day.

10. Pantry

This well-stocked pantry has enough staples to keep the inhabitants and staff of Rose Keep in comfortable meals for at least a month, and three times that if forced to stretch it.

11. Closet

Cleaning supplies predominant in this chamber. Janson Pleth has a small chair and tablet here that he uses to plan each day's maintenance activities.

12. Day Room

A few comfortable chairs complete this simple area.

13. Vanargen's Quarters

Star charts plaster this room's walls. Vanargen is rarely found here—he's more often on top of the tower in his observatory. A secret trapdoor in the ceiling of Vanargen's room (DC 23 Perception check to find) opens onto the roof of the two-story structure attached to the tower. If one were to move up to the roof in this fashion and walk straight south to the side of the tower, one might find (DC 20 Perception check) the cunningly recessed rungs of a ladder that leads up to the top of the tower and into the observatory.

Observatory

The observatory atop the main tower is accessible by a ladder down the tower's side and from thence to a secret trapdoor to Vanargen's Quarters (room 13). The equipment here is made up of a rusted arrangement of metal spars that hold a variety of chipped and frosted glass lenses. The lenses can be arranged in various fashions to garner strange visual effects, none of which appear particularly enlightening to anyone by Vanargen, who waxes eloquent about how his "star observing device" has allowed him to see more constellations than anyone had ever suspected existed.

14. Dorim Cragwatcher's Quarters

A plethora of parchment and writing instruments messily litter the stout desk crammed into this chamber. Dorim is constantly scheming, though most of his schemes are those that are arguably legitimate and appear at least in the short term to be in the interest of the enclave. Thus Tharna tries her best to ignore him.

A search through the morass (DC 25 Perception) brings to light a parchment on which Dorim has apparently lost a loose sheet from his journal that reads, "merchandise must be either sold or dispatched before the 13th of the month lest T. visit the cellar and find them. Maybe can convince V. to support me if I find him a novel star chart? Looking forward to when I can run this place without T.'s interference."

15. Library and Laboratory

A great variety of tomes relating to magical theory and practice are assembled in this chamber, as well as at least three ritual scrolls of *enchant item*. A few tables and cabinets are given over to common ritual components (2,000 gp value) and raw residuum (23,000 gp value). Nonmagic rods, wands, bracers, and other objects are stored in great chests.

Anyone attempting an Arcana check in this chamber who is willing to spend 5 minutes perusing the stacks gains a +2 bonus to the check.

It's not unusual to find Tharna here referring to a tome or working with an item.

A lightly inscribed magic circle decorates the floor here (DC 15 Perception to notice). A successful DC 20 Arcana check reveals that the circle provides instantaneous transport to a nearby location (another DC 20 Arcana check to activate); the circle connects to the underground cellars, specifically to area 18.

16. Tharna's Quarters

This frugal chamber houses a comfortable bed, a bureau filled with rich garments, and memorabilia left to Tharna by her mother.

17. Tower Storey Two

This area could be used by defending wizards or guards to hurl down spells or more mundane missiles on invaders, if it comes to it.

18. Cellar Entrance

A magic circle scribed on the floor in this wide niche allows two-way transport between the subterranean cellars and room 15 of Rose Keep above. A pass-phrase should be called out by arrivals to avoid reprisal (see rooms 20–23).

A DC 25 Arcana check reveals that this magic circle has an alternate exit point—in addition to the exit in room 15, it also has the capacity to teleport those who step on it and trigger it (DC 20 Arcana check) to an empty warehouse on the docks that Dorim owns. This is how Dorim moves questionable merchandise in and out of Rose Enclave.

19. Cellars

This hidden space beneath the enclave was excavated by magic back when Thay first founded the compound. Meant to be a potential staging ground for Thayan interests, this wide space was to have been stocked with an arcane arsenal of golemwork soldiers and spell-enhanced creatures loyal to Thay. Those plans failed to find fruition, yet dangerous creatures remain in the cellar, and now serve to guard it against intrusion (see rooms 20–23).

When particularly valuable magic items (a subjective valuation made by Tharna on items whose level exceeds 9) pass through the enclave, she likes to store them in room 25, the so-called "Temple."

20–23. Guardian Niches

These niches each contain a creature keyed to defend the cellars. When intruders appear on the magic circle in 18 and fail to call out the pass phrase ("mesmeric hold, blast of cold, let me grow old") within 1 round of appearing, the portcullis bars on areas 20–23 go up, and the guardian creatures ensconced within emerge to defend the cellars.

20: 1 venom eye basilisk (level 10 artillery; *Monster Manual* page 26).

21: 1 mezzodemon (level 11 soldier; *Monster Manual* page 58)

22: 1 gibbering mouther (level 10 controller; *Monster Manual* page 126)

23: 1 skeletal tomb guardian (level 10 brute; *Monster Manual* page 235)

24. Frequently Empty

This rusted iron door is usually unlocked and empty. However, it sometimes holds questionable merchandise placed by Dorim under Tharna's nose. Depending on the scenario, this chamber could hold slaves in shackles, banned drugs, or demoncraft relics. Dorim knows Tharna visits the cellars only once a month on the 13th, so he clears out the chamber and tries to remove any telltales of usage, though anyone who spends any time in the chamber who succeeds at a DC 15 Perception check can see that the lack of dust, scuffmarks, and other clues appropriate to the scenario show that this chamber was only recently emptied.

25. The Temple

This temple was never hallowed, though when Tharna's son resided here, he conducted a few preliminary services to different demon lords before Tharna ousted him.

The altar contains a secret compartment (DC 25 Perception to find, DC 25 Thievery to unlock) that contains two nasty items, once the cherished possessions of a supposedly long-dead cambion named Dulaphras. These are the *ring of fury* and the *belt of fiends*. Tharna keeps them here, safe against use and discovery, and thinks that no one else knows of their presence.

Belt of Fiends **Level 15**

This belt fills you with hellborn power and protects you from a devil's attacks.

Item Slot: Waist 25,000 gp

Property: Gain a +2 item bonus to Athletics checks and Strength ability checks (but not Strength attacks).

Power (Daily): Immediate Interrupt. You can use this power when you are hit by an attack. Gain a +3 power bonus to defense against that attack; you can decide to use the power after the DM tells you the attack die total.

If the attacker is a devil, then it also takes 20 radiant damage.

Special: If worn with the *ring of fury*, you gain a +2 item bonus to Diplomacy, Insight, Bluff, and Religion checks when dealing with devils.

Ring of Fury **Level 14**

This ring gleams with hate.

Item Slot: Ring 21,000 gp

Property: Gain a +2 item bonus to Intimidate checks.

Power (Daily): Free Action. When you are first bloodied, make two basic attacks.

Special: If worn with the *belt of fiends*, you gain a +2 item bonus to Diplomacy, Insight, Bluff, and Religion checks when dealing with devils.

About the Author

Bruce Cordell is a D&D designer, but during his twelve years in the game industry, he has dabbled in miniatures, board games, collectible card games, d20 games, and more. Bruce has over a sixty listed credits to his name, including the *Expanded Psionics Handbook*, *Libris Mortis*, and *Expedition to Castle Ravenloft*. His body of work also includes three published Forgotten Realms® novels (*Lady of Poison*, *Darkvision*, and *Stardeep*), with more on the way.

FORGOTTEN REALMS®

GONTAL

by Bruce R. Cordell and Ed Greenwood

cartography by Robert Lazzaretti

Isolated from the bustle of Returned Abeir, Gontal is a western land that hunkers behind its mountainous border and reveals little of itself to outsiders except for irregular trade that trickles out of Gontal Pass east across the Esmur Flats into the Dusk Ports. The trade consists primarily of lotions, oils, wines, and specialty herbs, as well as the occasional magical elixir and oddly ornamented golemwork toy.

Gontal Lore

A character knows the following information with a successful check.

History DC 10: The land of Gontal was settled only a little less then a century ago by pioneering humans and dragonborn. Before that time, the region was avoided by dragon emperors and humanoids alike for fear of a Dawn Titan's brooding, metallic, and many-walled fortress that sprawled across a hundred miles of the area's northern reaches, which is now referred to as the Glaur Barrens. For more than a thousand years, no creature bothered the unnamed primordial, nor did the primordial stir from its fortress. When the Blue Breath of Change roared across Abeir, the fortress detonated in a blast of power as potent as the cataclysms that rocked the world before the Estelar (the gods) and the Dawn Titans divided it between them. Of the fortress, nothing remained but fragments and the occasional piece of strangely animate metallic sculpture.

Streetwise DC 10: The southern region of the country rages with intrigue. Here dragonborn, humans, dwarves, and other races compete for prestige in an urban hive, powerful Gontese families called the Twelvefold ally themselves with and betray each other in an endless dance of power, and dragon envoys that are openly in the employ of Melbrauth and Skelkor prowl the streets. All the while Queen Imreera Hethkantan, from her seat in Gontal City, seems strangely disaffected. By all popular accounts she expresses more interest in the Glaur Barrens than the latest mischief of the Twelvefold.

Streetwise DC 15: The Glaur Barrens occupy all the land north and northwest of Lake Glaur. By most accounts, the barrens are a mixture of sun-obscuring earthmotes, infectious plaguelands, and strangely regular metallic ruins mostly fallen into the earth. Treasure-seekers sometimes venture north, staging their expeditions out of the fortified keep of Rimlost on the edge of the crater lake. Within the ruins, seekers sometimes dislodge melted clumps of precious metal, including copper, silver, gold, and even platinum. Sometimes broken creatures sculpted of iron, stone, and petrified wood are also discovered, which are worth great sums of money in the mansions of the Twelvefold, except for the ones that take on murderous animation.

Settlements and Features

Situated around the mouth of the River Orlaphar, the region consists of the ruling seat of Gontal City, two port towns, and a couple of small fortified settlements higher along the River Orlaphar. Few people in Gontal dare to travel into or even think much about the desolate northern plains, which usually are referred to as the Glaur Barrens. However, an adventurous minority remain unafraid to explore the fallen realm of a Dawn Titan (a primordial) whose name few now recall.

Gontal City

Capital City; Population 30,000

The capital of Gontal is a walled city of narrow, close-packed stone buildings with tile roofs, most three to five floors high. The streets are of cobblestone, and its grander mansions are enclosed in stone walls that feature ornamental spires and small corner-towers and gatehouses.

Gontal is the seat of the queen and hosts the mansions of the Twelvefold. Many murmur that the Twelvefold have become the real rulers of Gontal, but not in the hearing of the queen. Rumors have it each of the Twelvefold have gold vaults under their mansions, and that each vault is secured by traps, guardians, and even misleading sham vaults that contain only a single, mocking gold coin.

Key People of Gontal

Queen Imreera Hethkantan: The queen is shrewd woman of inherited wealth and modest wizardry. She employs spies to keep her reliably informed of local events. She uses go-betweens to hire specialists to thwart Twelvefold schemes she deems too disruptive. Such hirelings might never learn their commissions ultimately descend from the crown. At the same time, the queen continues to openly contract explorers willing to brave the Glaur Barrens in search of ancient treasures and lore.

The Twelvefold: The twelve families of the Twelvefold include the Clargannuth, Elkannath, Garrandar, Imrilsar, Keldorn, and Morlith, to name a few. Most of the nobles spend the majority of energy and resources in intricate plots to unseat the others and propel itself to the top of the heap in a baroque game of status and reputation that doesn't disdain any stratagem in the struggle, though great pains are taken to disguise illegal activities, if any.

Larrana Vestel: Larrana is a famous guide and guard available to visitors seeking to explore the mines of Haelond or even venture into the Glaur Barrens. Her fees are high, but her skill with the bow and knowledge of the north lands are worth the coin.

Mortyn Wahrandur: Operating out of Szant, Mortyn is a master surgeon who by physical, herbal, and magical means can skillfully alter faces forever, repair injured limbs, and sew up wounds.

Narla Gulmaern: This spellscarred tiefling is said to disrupt arcane magic and rituals with her mere presence. She owns and runs Gontal's most notorious tavern, The Night Kiss, and is deadly with a variety of poisons.

Gontal City hosts a competent, highly trained patrol known as the Tabards, who wear distinctive black armor and answer ultimately to the queen.

Overland trade through the Gontal Pass is organized at the city's eastern gate. When visitors from other parts of Returned Abeir visit (a rare event), they come first to Gontal City, but if they're lucky, they don't fall prey to the tapestried lies of the Twelvefold before they learn the lay of the land.

Szant

Port Town; Population 9,600

Administered by Docklord Maerigo Rustal on behalf of the queen, Szant is the home of several sizeable fishing fleets. The famous ship, the *Argus Treader*, also puts in at Szant. Unlike most of the other vessels, the *Argus Treader* is not owned by the Twelvefold. Captain Madwave commands the ship, and Madwave has never lost a crew, a cargo, or even a seemingly ill-advised bet on how quickly her craft can pull in a catch even during the height of winter.

Velandilmur

Port Town; Population 3,400

Administered by Docklord Lantra Orhond on behalf of the queen, this small but growing town has always housed the disfigured, maimed, outlawed, and unwanted. The place has the reputation of being dangerous to strangers. In Velandilmur, many are not what they seem.

Rimlost

Frontier Fort; Population 500

The stone stockades of Rimlost look out over the water-filled crater of Glaur Lake and northwest across the Glaur Barrens, a dangerous terrain of earthmotes, changelands, and ruins of a devastated 100-mile wide Dawn Titan fortress. Those wishing to explore the strangely deep lake or the barrens often set base camp here.

Plots and Adventure Sites

The Orlaphar valley is wild and trackless, and the Glaur Barrens beyond are haunted by creatures that defy easy description.

Darkturret: This stronghold, built by the Garrandar family fifty years ago, now stands ruined on the banks of the Orlaphar. The shattered, abandoned keep was used by the Garrandar to hide wealth stolen from other Twelvefold families. A vengeance party was not-so-secretly assembled, and it descended upon the place. Ghosts haunt the upper levels, and opportunistic monsters roam the lower vaults. Rumors persist of treasuries never unearthed to this day.

Haelond: This Elkannath-dug mine fell 10 years ago to crimson-carapaced creatures that swarmed up from a fresh cut. The dwarves of Eklannath abandoned their settlement in terror and swore never to return. The tunnels are said to link to a vast underworld below.

Glaur Barrens: Great treasures lie in the barrens, but terrible dangers also lurk in the deceptively calm landscape. The barrens are an expanse of rusted iron, sparse vegetation, unmoored earthmotes, and death.

Fissures open onto tunnels that plunge deep into the earth—tunnels that must be part of the destroyed Dawn Titan Fortress. The deeper one descends, the more likely one is to unearth a lump of melted gold or platinum. On the other hand, in the depths adventurers are also likely to find golemlike constructs possessed of a murderous pseudolife. Called anaxims, these creatures appear as conglomerations of iron, gears, shearing blades, and metallic hides jutting with too many cutting implements and rusted surfaces. Whatever the true nature of the Dawn Titan whose exploding fortress created the barrens, it is clear the entity was something of an artificer.

About the Authors

Bruce Cordell is a D&D designer, but during his twelve years in the game industry, he has dabbled in miniatures, board games, collectible card games, d20 games, and more. Bruce has over a sixty listed credits to his name, including the *Expanded Psionics Handbook*, *Libris Mortis*, and *Expedition to Castle Ravenloft*. His body of work also includes three published *Forgotten Realms* novels (*Lady of Poison*, *Darkvision*, and *Stardeep*), with more on the way.

Ed Greenwood is the creator of the **Forgotten Realms** fantasy world, which became the setting for his home **D&D** game in 1975. He has published over two hundred articles in ***Dragon** Magazine* and ***Polyhedron*** newszine, is a lifetime charter member of the RPGA, has written over thirty books and modules for TSR and Wizards of the Coast, and been Gen Con Game Fair guest of honor several times. In addition to all these activities, Ed works as a library clerk and has edited over a dozen small press magazines. When not appearing at conventions, he lives in an old farmhouse in the countryside of Ontario, Canada.

Characters of War

Backgrounds for Your Scales of War Hero

by David Noonan

illustrations by Austin Hsu, and Tina Young

THE SETTING OF the *Scales of War* Adventure Path is more implied than actual. That's intentional on our part. We want you to make the world your own rather than define it for you (beyond the degree of definition required to place future adventures).

But from "Rescue at Rivenroar" onward, your characters at your table will come to life and develop their own backstories, goals, and agendas. As a launching pad for those backstories, we offer the following character backgrounds. Each one comes with a small game benefit, usually a small skill modifier. But power-gamers beware! You'll search in vain for significant advantage. The bonuses are intentionally small because we don't want a character's past to overshadow that character's present. Think of these backgrounds as aids to roleplaying, not the means to eke out an incremental advantage to a skill check.

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We've identified some backgrounds as being particularly good for a given race or class. Check the ones for your race and class out first, of course, but don't limit yourself to those. Sometimes it's fun to play against type and choose a background that stands at odds with what people would expect from your race and class. It's your story, and your PC is a singular character within it. Don't feel like you have to obey a sort of demographic imperative to be a "typical" elf or a "typical" fighter.

One final note: You'll notice proper names lurking in some of the backgrounds. Feel free to run with those, and don't be surprised if some of the places, groups, and people mentioned here appear in future steps on the *Scales of War* adventure path.

Wandering Duelist

I am a student of the True Blade. Perhaps you'd like to match yours against mine? I guarantee we'll both learn something.

You are an itinerant warrior—sometimes a conscript, sometimes a mercenary, but often just a wanderer with a sharp sword and an empty coin-purse. How did you learn your initial training in the combat arts? Why haven't you resorted to out-and-out banditry? What places have you visited in your wandering? What would it take for you to settle down?

Benefit: You add Intimidate to your class skill list and give yourself a +3 bonus to Intimidate checks.

Good Background: Dragonborn.

Scorned Noble

I am an exile of honor, set apart from my people. Yet in my heart, I remain as steadfast as ever to those I will never see again.

You grew up as one of the best and brightest, but what happened to send you away from your life of privilege? Was it a legal matter, an affair of the heart, or the skullduggery of a rival noble family? Are members of your noble family secretly supporting you or remaining sympathetic to your cause? Do you intend to go back, and if so, what needs to happen first?

Benefit: You are used to going it alone. You gain a +2 bonus to saving throws whenever no allies are within 5 squares of you.

Good Background: Dragonborn.

Redemption Seeker

I am an instrument of honor. I am he who seeks the weight to balance the scales.

Somewhere in your past, you behaved less than honorably. Perhaps it was a moment of ill-considered rage, a flirtation outside society's boundaries, or maybe you took the blame for someone else's lack of honor. Ever since, you have been striving to act impeccably and with such valor that you redeem yourself for the transgression in your past. What great event started your quest for redemption? Is there anyone trying to thwart your efforts? Have you given any thought to what will happen after you balance the scales of honor?

Benefit: You add Diplomacy and Insight to your class skill list, and you gain a +1 bonus to Diplomacy and Insight checks.

Good Background: Dragonborn.

Seeker for the Lost Clan

I'm an ordinary sort, but those I'm seeking are extraordinary. Quite extraordinary indeed.

Some say you are the last of your breed, but you don't think so. Although your family is gone for good, you've been tracking down rumors of another branch of your ancestry. They're out there somewhere, and you want desperately to be reunited with them. What clues do you have that the lost clan exists? Who raised you, if not this lost clan? And on a fundamental level, why do you want to find them so intensely?

Benefit: You add History and Dungeoneering to your class skill list, and you gain a +1 bonus to History and Dungeoneering checks.

Good Background: Dwarf.

Warsmith

"Crafter" is too mundane a term for me, but "artist" implies a concern with form, not function. Place me somewhere in between. Call me an artisan.

You make powerful weapons and armor, instruments of warfare both elegant and deadly. Who taught you your craft, and what is your relationship like with your mentor? Is there something you've always wanted to make, but you've lacked the proper materials for it? To what degree do you insist on wielding weapons you make yourself, and how do you react when you examine someone else's work?

Benefit: You can construct your own weapons and armor, given proper tools and raw materials. Making a weapon takes two days, and making armor takes four days. Doing so confers no economic advantage, however. The item ultimately costs the same as it would if you'd purchased it directly. And you can cast Creation rituals as if you had the Ritual Caster feat.

Good Background: Dwarf.

Brother in Battle

I'm the sort that craves only a sharp axe, a bitter ale—and companions true to share them with.

Not everyone needs to be chased across the world by black-cloaked assassins. You crave fighting, beer-drinking, and companionship of either the friendly or the romantic sort. Have you always had such simple desires, or did you come to this simplicity after years spent striving for something more esoteric? Are there particular enemies you relish fighting—or particular brands of ale you savor?

Benefit: You add Endurance to your class skill list, and you gain a +3 bonus to Endurance checks.

Good Background: Dwarf.

Seducer

I assure you my reputation is exaggerated—at least a little. But my reputation had to have piqued your curiosity, or you wouldn't be here, would you?

You can't keep away from romantic liaisons with the attractive and the alluring. And after practice, you're good at it, having slept your way through a dozen manor-houses and noble villas. How mercenary are your seductions—do you genuinely fall in love easily, or is there always an ulterior motive? Are you motivated by the sheer beauty of your paramours, the chase and conquest, or the fringe benefits of bedding the wealthy and influential? Is there someone who got away, or someone unusually resistant to your charms?

Benefit: You add Bluff and Insight to your class skill list, and you gain a +1 bonus to Bluff and Insight checks.

Good Background: Eladrin.

Magic Scholar

I can recite the Twelve Trigonomystiks from memory, and I've read all the Moon-Opal Analects. I favor the Vallander Folio, but I do concede that the Braytonburg Folio is more concise.

You believe that magic is the key to unlocking fundamental secrets of the universe, and you'll eagerly delve into eldritch tomes to learn from the masters of bygone ages. Is there a particular aspect of magic that you're eager to master? A particular scholar or school of thought you favor? And how do you react when you encounter a magic phenomenon that doesn't behave the way your theories tell you it should?

Benefit: You add Arcana and History to your class skill list, and you gain a +1 bonus to Arcana and History checks.

Good Background: Eladrin.

You believe that magic is the key to unlocking fundamental secrets of the universe, and you'll eagerly delve into eldritch tomes to learn from the masters of bygone ages.

Eldritch Harlequin

I'm the fly in the proverbial ointment, I suppose. But I've never been much for proverbs. They're just rules that happen to rhyme sometimes.

Your tie to the mysterious and fey places in the world is particularly strong. You've always been a mischievous sort—a troublemaker, and the person who upsets the apple-cart just to see how far the apples will roll. What sorts of trouble has your mischief resulted in? Are there partners in crime in your past, and what's your relationship with them like? How does someone inclined to mischief make a living? Under what circumstances can you overcome your natural instinct and toe the line?

Benefit: You add Bluff and Thievery to your class skill list, and you gain a +1 bonus to Bluff and Thievery checks.

Good Background: Eladrin.

Silent Hunter

I'm either someone you never see, or I'm the last someone you see.

From a young age, you were trained to track, stalk, and bring down your prey. The hunter's outlook is now pervasive in your life—your problems are merely elusive quarry that you relentlessly hunt down and ultimately claim as a trophy. Is there a particular monster you're particularly good at hunting? One that frustrates you? Or frightens you? Who taught you the art of stealth? And have you ever had the tables turned on you, when someone or something hunted you?

Benefit: You add Stealth and Perception to your class skill list, and you gain a +1 bonus to Stealth and Perception checks.

Good Background: Elf.

Forest Warden

I'm just part of the Whorlwood. But I'm its leaves, its branches, its trunk, its roots.

You regard yourself as part of the natural world—but you're the part of the natural world that nurtures and protects the rest. You strive against dangers both mundane (like a rapacious woodcutter) and magical (a mysterious taint that kills vegetation by night). Why are you now an adventurer rather than still in your forest? How do you react when you're taken far from the natural world, like the heart of a city or another plane of existence? Is there a particular enemy of the forest that you're still striving against?

Benefit: You add Nature and Perception to your class skill list, and you gain a +1 bonus to Nature and Perception checks.

Good Background: Elf.

Explorer/Guide

I'm the only one who can get you from here to Rythan Keep in less than two weeks. And I'll make sure you don't wind up in a gnoll tribe's soup cauldron.

Ever since you saw your first map, you wanted to know what the lands beyond the margin looked like. And as an inveterate traveler, you've started to find out. What places have you seen on your journeys? How do you make ends meet? What's the greatest danger you've ever faced? Is there a mythical place you're particularly keen to visit someday?

Benefit: Learn an extra language of your choice, add Nature to your class skill list, and you gain a +2 bonus to Nature checks.

Good Background: Elf.

Merchant Prince

I'm the only guy who can get you spiderhaunt silk within 10 leagues of here. And that's just the start of the business we can accomplish together.

You've always had a knack for mercantile affairs, and nothing pleases you more than a deal that's profitable for you—and good enough for the other party that he comes back for more. Is there a particular trade or commodity that you're expert at doing business in? Who gets you your goods, and to whom do you sell? Who are your business partners? Investors? Rivals?

Benefit: Learn an extra language of your choice, add Insight to your class skill list, and you gain a +2 bonus to Insight checks.

Good Background: Half-elf.

You have a justifiable pride in your powers of observation and deduction, and you take a delight in surprising others with your conclusions that borders on the theatrical.

Detective

I'm the guy who noticed how sharp your sword is, despite the fact that you aren't carrying a whetstone. But I suppose calling it "your" sword isn't really accurate, is it?

You have a justifiable pride in your powers of observation and deduction, and you take a delight in surprising others with your conclusions that borders on the theatrical. How did you hone your inquisitive nature? With the city watch, in a noble court, or among the priesthood? Are there particularly notable crimes you've solved? If so, did your efforts earn you any lifetime friends or enemies?

Benefit: You add Perception and Insight to your class skill list, and you gain a +1 bonus to Perception and Insight checks.

Good Background: Half-elf.

Wandering Mercenary

I served with the Targa Lancers throughout the Montesi Incursion, then I trained the Wallach family retinue when they took back Blackbarrow Castle. That led to a promotion when the orcs invaded, and I . . .

The art of war is one you know well, and you've marched with armies both to victory and to defeat. What key battles did you take part in? What was your rank, and did you have any particular duties? Do you have old war comrades around, and how do they feel about you?

Benefit: It takes four failed death saves to kill you.

Good Background: Half-elf.

Con Artist

I'm not the guy you're looking for. Seriously, I was in Oakmont last night. I wasn't even here.

You've long made a living on the backs of the greedy, the gullible, and the unobservant. What sort of confidence games did you favor—elaborate conspiracies, rigged games of chance, or ruses that facilitated traditional crimes like burglary, robbery, or kidnapping? How did you learn your trade? How close have you come to being caught? And how many enemies are out there, looking for a chance to get even?

Benefit: You add Bluff and Thievery to your class skill list, and you gain a +1 bonus to Bluff and Thievery checks.

Good Background: Halfling.

Street Urchin

I'm part of the Redboot crew, and that's all you need to hear.

You grew up on the mean streets of an urban metropolis, and you quickly found safety amid numbers of likeminded poor youths. They taught you to fight, to steal (mostly from those who had something worth stealing), and to protect what little you had. How did you escape that life of poverty and petty crime? Under what circumstances will you go back? And what happened to your family friends in the meantime?

Benefit: You add Intimidate and Streetwise to your class skill list, and you gain a +1 bonus to Intimidate and Streetwise checks.

Good Background: Halfling

River Smuggler

I'm either a simple boatman, or a not-so-simple boatman. Depends who's askin'.

You've plied the rivers and coastlines of the world, making a little money on official cargo and a lot of money on the crates hidden in the bow compartment. What did you smuggle, and why was it contraband? Who did you deal with on each end of your journey? Did you ever get caught? Or double-crossed?

Benefit: You add Athletics and Streetwise to your class skill list, and you gain a +1 bonus to Athletics and Streetwise checks.

Good Background: Halfling.

Cloistered Priest

I took my vows as a child in the grand temple at Tarsalee, and I've served there faithfully ever since.

You've grown up in the heart of religious worship, and you know the rituals and rites of your faith better than most. What event sent you out into the wider world? Under what circumstances will you return? Given your sheltered upbringing, how do you react to the strange and the dangerous?

Benefit: You add Religion to your class skill list, and you gain a +3 bonus to Religion checks.

Good Background: Human.

Gritty Sergeant

Don't call me 'sir.' I work for a living, soldier! I was picking boys like you off the turf back when your mama was picking daisies in the field. Your papa, too.

You've led people into battle and had them bleed on you as they died. But many of them lived to fight again. You've seen them come and go, sometimes so quickly that you never learned their names. Are there particular battles you remember well—or curse? Particular generals who wasted the lives of the those in your care? To what degree have you made the transition to civilian life? Ever get caught giving orders just like the old days, or are you glad to have that responsibility lifted from your shoulders?

Benefit: You gain proficiency in a simple or military weapon of your choice, and you gain a +1 bonus to initiative checks.

Good Background: Human.

Noble Scion

The last name is Rocannon. Our lands are east of here, encompassing the towns of New Laurel and Krindelton and extending up to Plover Pass.

You grew up as one of the best and brightest, having access to more training and more opportunity than anyone else around you. What sorts of esoteric activities—falconry, courtly intrigues, fine art—were you exposed to? What event set you on the adventurer's path? How do you feel about those who didn't have the privilege and opportunity you did?

Benefit: You add a knowledge skill of your choice to your class skill list, and you gain a +2 bonus to checks with that skill.

Good Background: Human.

Scion of an Ancient Bloodline

The blood of the Khavarran runs through my veins. Aha! I see you're schooled enough to recognize the dynastic name.

Your circumstances might be reduced at the moment, but the nigh-mythical sorcerer-kings of the tiefling empire are among your ancestors. You cannot help but dream of those bygone days. What sort of ruler was your ancestor . . . according to your family and according to the history books? Are there particular qualities of your ancestor that you're eager to emulate, or perhaps repudiate? Do you entertain dreams of ruling an empire yourself someday?

Benefit: You add History to your class skill list, and you gain a +3 bonus to History checks.

Good Background: Tiefling.

Cult Escapee

The tattoo means I was a member of the Six-Fingered Hand. You'll notice I said "was" a member.

At first the group appeared to be on to something big, and you wanted to be part. But when you saw how dark their grand design was, you escaped. What drew you to the cult in the first place, and what caused you to spurn it? Who was in the cult: your friends, your family, your whole community? Are they hunting you still?

Benefit: You add Arcana and Bluff to your class skill list, and you gain a +1 bonus to Arcana and Bluff checks.

Good Background: Tiefling.

Young Cutthroat

You've heard of the Chillbain Clan in New Shardaluum? I've got a lot of Chillbain friends. Close friends, if you know what I mean.

You were the violent arm of an organized crime cartel, dispensing bloody punishment for real and imagined slights. How were you recruited into the syndicate; was it based on family, trade guild, or neighborhood ties? How high did you rise in its ranks? Why aren't you still there? Is there a price on your head from the authorities, the crime syndicate, or both?

Benefit: You add Intimidate and Thievery to your class skill list, and you gain a +1 bonus to Intimidate and Thievery checks.

Good Background: Tiefling.

Auspicious Birth

I was born on the slopes of Mount Emberstare during an eclipse, when the moon turned as red as blood.

The circumstances of your birth were somehow blessed, and you grew up knowing you were somehow set apart and special. Who regards your birth as auspicious? Are you tied to a specific prophecy, and if so, what does it say? How were you treated differently as a child?

Benefit: You substitute your highest ability score for Constitution to determine your initial hit points.

Good Background: Cleric.

Traveling Missionary

I bring you the unending light of Pelor—light that illuminates the darkness, comforts the weary and wounded, and vexes the black of heart.

Your calling is to bring the light of your chosen faith to the dark corners of the world. What places have you seen in your journeys, and were they receptive, indifferent, or antagonistic to your message? How do you feel when you're back in the temples of the faithful? What circumstances will cause you to leave the road and settle down?

Benefit: Learn an extra language of your choice, add Religion to your class skill list, and gain a +2 bonus to Religion checks.

Good Background: Cleric.

Recent Convert

Look, I was once an ordinary fellow like you. But during the Shrieking Plague, I found a source of power I'd never imagined. Or perhaps it found me.

You weren't always the religious sort. But you recently had a supernatural experience that changed your outlook and showed you your true calling. What was that event? Are there unanswered questions in its wake? And how did you feel about religion (both your new one and religions in general) prior to your conversion?

Benefit: Once per encounter, reroll a failed saving throw against a charm effect.

Good Background: Cleric.

Former Gladiator

I trained under Thool Rhak, fighting in various pits across the northern trade towns. Then I survived two seasons in the Terrimula Arena over in Jarrak City. So yeah, I know my stuff.

You've grown up fighting for the amusement of the crowd. Did you seek out this life, or was it thrust upon you? What sorts of gladiatorial spectacles did you take part in: individual combats, staged mass battles, gladiator-vs.-monster fights, or inherently unfair gladiator

punishments (like unarmed prisoners against beasts)? And what kept you going? The whips of your masters, the lure of competition, or the roar of the crowd?

Benefit: It takes four failed death saves to kill you.

Good Background: Fighter.

Haunted Veteran

I marched south into the jungle with Atrelius. Can we talk about something else?

You saw things in the war that no one should have to see, and the horrors of war changed your personality. What were you like before you went to war? Under what circumstances will you share what you experienced? How do you keep those memories at bay: By adventuring and other hardships, through prayer, or with a bottle?

Benefit: Once per encounter, reroll a failed saving throw against a fear effect.

Good Background: Fighter.

Former Barbarian

My people are the Khartalli Narash—the "wolves of the desert" in your tongue.

Your formative years were spent as part of an indigenous tribe of hunter-gatherers. As a nomad, you went where the food was, traveling across the wilderness from season to season. What happened to your tribe? What would it take for you to return? And were you a typical member of the tribe, or was there something that set you apart?

Benefit: You add Nature to your class skill list, and you gain a +1 bonus to Nature checks.

Good Background: Fighter.

Prison Conversion

The scars are just evidence of a wayward youth. I'm actually a testament to the power of prison ministry.

You did something bad enough to result in your imprisonment, but while there, your life changed. Upon your release, you took up your new life with a crusader's zeal. For what crime were you imprisoned? How did you attain your release? Do you have difficulty reconciling your old life with your new calling? How do you react when your old life re-emerges unexpectedly?

Benefit: You add Streetwise to your class skill list, and you gain a +3 bonus to Streetwise checks.

Good Background: Paladin.

Crusading Zealot

I am but a humble instrument of my god. But I'm an instrument with several sharp edges, to be sure.

Your calling is an intensely personal one. The voices of the gods themselves have sent you on your crusade, and they periodically guide you to this day. How do others react when you tell them what drives you forward? What was it like the first time you received divine inspiration? Do you ever doubt or question the voices from the gods?

Benefit: You gain a +1 bonus to saving throws until you fail a saving throw, and then the bonus is gone until you rest.

Good Background: Paladin.

Trained from Birth for a Specific Prophecy

The doves? They come and go as they please. By Choinero's wisdom, the doves will watch over me until the day of the Great Rift.

The prophetic words were written in scripture long before you were born, and you're part of a concentrated effort to fulfill, safeguard, or thwart that prophecy. What is the nature of the prophecy, and what's your relationship to it? Do you question whether your fate is truly ordained? And who or what is standing in your way?

Benefit: Once per day, you can reroll an initiative check if you don't like the result. You keep the second result whether it's better, the same, or worse.

Good Background: Paladin.

Last of the Breed

Everyone says that the Resolute Two Hundred are no more. That's not true—not as long I draw breath, anyway.

You were part of an elite order of roving guardians—but they're all gone and only you remain. What caused the order to die out? How did you escape that fate? Will you try to rejuvenate the order, or are you resigned to it passing into history?

Benefit: You add Endurance and Perception to your class skill list, and you gain a +1 bonus to Endurance and Perception checks.

Good Background: Ranger.

Other people run away screaming when they see a monster. You run toward it screaming.

Monster Hunter

I'm a hunter of exotic game. The more cunning and elusive, the better. And if the locals all call it a legend, that's best of all.

Other people run away screaming when they see a monster. You run toward it screaming. You like testing your mettle against the strangest and most horrible creatures that the dark places of the world spawn. What's your greatest trophy taken to date? Is there a particular sort of monster that is your nemesis? And are there certain circumstances that make your hunt a "fair" one or make your quarry a "worthy" adversary?

Benefit: You gain a +2 bonus whenever you use a knowledge skill to make a monster knowledge check (as described on page 180 of the *Player's Handbook*).

Good Background: Ranger.

Fugitive from a Vengeful Rival

Suffice it to say that Lord Sakrath is no friend of mine. There was a falling out, followed by several impromptu duels and an abrupt departure.

You've angered someone powerful enough to make you a fugitive. Every month brings new evidence that your rival's wrath hasn't waned: a bounty hunter, trouble with the authorities, or posters indicated yet another increase in the price on your head. What event caused you to take flight? How long have you been on the run, and what lands have you traveled through on the way? Is there something other than your death that will end the chase? Are you trying to escape, or will you ultimately turn the tables on your rival?

Benefit: You add Bluff and Stealth to your class skill list, and you gain a +1 bonus to Bluff and Stealth checks.

Good Background: Ranger.

Assassin

I bear the Sigil of Vaurom. I have tasted the Black Lotus Tea and seen the sublime mysteries within Vaurom's Impossible Crypt. I say this not as a boast, but as a warning.

You've been trained in the thousand arts of death, sent to preemptively kill the powerful. What secret order taught you your trade, and how did they recruit you? What targets have you assassinated, and did any escape your clutches? Do you have a current contract, did you give up the assassin's life, or are you on the run?

Benefit: You add Arcana and Stealth to your class skill list, and you gain a +1 bonus to Arcana and Stealth checks.

Good Background: Rogue.

Cat Burglar

The Hrulla Tower in Jarrak City? I've been in and out of there three times. The ivy on the courtyard walls is pretty much a "Please Steal From Me" sign.

You take an artisan's approach to large-scale burglary, stealing from the most well-protected treasure troves you can find. What particularly notable items have you stolen, and what did you do with the proceeds? Did you work alone or as part of a gang? If you worked with others, what do they think of you now? Did you ever get caught?

Benefit: You add Athletics and Thievery to your class skill list, and you gain a +1 bonus to Athletics and Thievery checks.

Good Background: Rogue.

Political Rebel

I'm the guy who's going to put Lord Chaulchert's head on a pike and free the whole Mirrin Valley from the whip of his taskmasters.

You struggle against political injustice. Perhaps the nobles are oppressing the serfs, the church is quashing religious rivals, the king is crushing the trade guilds, or the guilds are suppressing independent mercantilists. You're on the side of the underdog, and you've escalated the struggle beyond words to direct action. Against whom are you rebelling? Are you part of a larger revolutionary cell, or do you act alone? What will things look like when you've won? What put you on the adventurer's path?

Benefit: You add Diplomacy and Streetwise to your class skill list, and you gain a +1 bonus to Diplomacy and Streetwise checks.

Good Background: Rogue.

On the Run from the Devil

I'm just a guy who's looking for a little more time before the bill comes due.

You've made an eldritch bargain, but you no longer like the terms. Accordingly, you're trying to alter or escape the bargain any way you can. Who is the bargain with, and what element of it are you trying to break (the term that involves your death, the devilish imprisonment of your family, or the forfeiture of your soul)? What specific form is the enforcement taking? In other words, who's chasing you?

Benefit: You add Bluff and Perception to your class skill list, and you gain a +1 bonus to Bluff and Perception checks.

Good Background: Warlock.

Apprentice of Sinister Cabal

I learned that trick from the very best: The Black Constellation.

To call your fellow conspirators a "cult" is to credit them with more fervor and less intelligence than they've earned. You are part of a secret group that wields arcane power for a dark, mysterious purpose—and there might be secrets within the cabal that you don't know about yet. How were you recruited into this cabal, and what is their professed aim? Do you have mentors, friends, or rivals in the cabal? Are you still an active member, or have you left the cabal temporarily or permanently?

Benefit: You add Arcana and Dungeoneering to your class skill list, and you gain a +1 bonus to Arcana and Dungeoneering checks.

Good Background: Warlock.

Born Under a Bad Sign

My mother told me that the caul was just superstition, and the howling wolves were just a coincidence. But I've seen enough to know that something . . . dark . . . is involved.

Your entire childhood was one superstitious omen after another. Individually, they're easy to ignore or explain away. But collectively, it's clear that something sinister has designs on your soul. What phenomena did you experience as a child? Do you still see omens in your daily life? And do you have any clues about the specifics of your dark destiny?

Benefit: You substitute your highest ability score for Constitution to determine your initial hit points.

Good Background: Warlock.

Vet Who Can't Let Go

We were encamped on the southern banks of the Trellisha River when the orcs came. It was like watching ants on the march. You could see the glint of spears from horizon to horizon. Then they just started throwing themselves into the river.

You've mustered out of the army, but you're forever bound to military life and you still see events through a soldier's eyes. What was your army career like? What major battles did you fight in, and did you encounter any great heroes or generals on the battlefield? Why aren't you still in the military? Under what circumstances could you reenlist?

Benefit: You add History and Intimidate to your class skill list, and you gain a +1 bonus to History and Intimidate checks.

Good Background: Warlord.

Noble Bred for War

My father, the fourth Lord of the Parapets, gave me that blade. More importantly, he taught me how to use it—and why.

You're part of a noble family with an ancestral mandate to safeguard the lands in your care. Often, that means marching off to war, and you learned the solemnity of that duty from an early age. What is your family protecting its lands against: monsters, barbaric hordes, bandits, or an invading army? Were there family members who spurned their duty? How does the adventurer's life fulfill your noble duty?

Benefit: You gain proficiency in a simple or military weapon of your choice, and you gain a +1 bonus to Diplomacy checks.

Good Background: Warlord.

Officer Who Came Out of Retirement

Well, we didn't do it that way during the Eastern Campaigns, I can tell you that.

You gave up a life in the army or the city watch long ago, but somehow you wound up eating hardtack and sleeping on a bedroll amid well-meaning but green recruits half your age. Under what circumstances did you retire, and then what got you back out on the trail? What lessons are you trying to pass on? What quirks of your comrades drive you crazy? What is it going to take for you to retire once again?

Benefit: You gain a +1 bonus to initiative checks, you add History to your class skill list, and you gain a +1 bonus to History checks.

Good Background: Warlord.

Arcane Student Who Saw Too Much

I was one of the brightest students in the Ebon Tower. But I was curious. And after I saw the demons bound in the basement, I knew some of my instructors were even more curious—and less scrupulous—than I was.

You've received extensive arcane training, but then you learned something sinister about your teachers. What did you learn? Did you confront them, or did you flee? Are they chasing you to try to win you back into the fold, or to make sure that you don't reveal their secrets?

Benefit: You receive a +1 bonus to saving throws to end effects that daze, stun, immobilize, or restrain you.

Good Background: Wizard.

BACKGROUNDS AT A GLANCE

Name	Background
Apprentice of Sinister Cabal	Warlock
Arcane Student Who Saw Too Much	Wizard
Assassin	Rogue
Auspicious Birth	Cleric
Born Under a Bad Sign	Warlock
Brother in Battle	Dwarf
Cat Burglar	Rogue
Cloistered Priest	Human
Con Artist	Halfling
Crusading Zealot	Paladin
Cult Escapee	Tiefling
Detective	Half-elf
Eldritch Harlequin	Eladrin
Explorer/Guide	Elf
Forest Warden	Elf
Former Barbarian	Fighter
Former Gladiator	Fighter
Fugitive from a Vengeful Rival	Ranger
Gritty Sergeant	Human
Haunted Veteran	Fighter
Imbuer	Wizard
Last of the Breed	Ranger
Magic Scholar	Eladrin
Merchant Prince	Half-elf
Missing Master	Wizard
Monster Hunter	Ranger
Noble Bred for War	Warlord
Noble Scion	Human
Officer Who Came Out of Retirement	Warlord
On the Run from the Devil	Warlock
Political Rebel	Rogue
Prison Conversion	Paladin
Recent Convert	Cleric
Redemption Seeker	Dragonborn
River Smuggler	Halfling
Scion of an Ancient Bloodline	Tiefling
Scorned Noble	Dragonborn
Seducer	Eladrin
Seeker for the Lost Clan	Dwarf
Silent Hunter	Elf
Street Urchin	Halfling
Trained from Birth for a Specific Prophecy	Paladin
Traveling Missionary	Cleric
Vet Who Can't Let Go	Warlord
Wandering Duelist	Dragonborn
Wandering Mercenary	Half-elf
Warsmith	Dwarf
Young Cutthroat	Tiefling

Missing Master

I learned the Art at the hands of Rodraig the Raven. He fled into the portal when the . . . things . . . came, and I've been looking for him ever since.

Your mentor disappeared under mysterious circumstances, and you've been trying to find him or her ever since. What was your master like, and what were the circumstances of the disappearance? What clues do you have that drive you forward? What will do when you find your missing master?

Benefit: You add Perception and Insight to your class skill list, and you gain a +1 bonus to Perception and Insight checks.

Good Background: Wizard.

Imbuer

In two different ways, you could call me a collector. I gather antiquities—items who've borne silent witness to great events. And then I collect magic potence to imbue within those antiquities, improving them to the limit of my ability.

The blending of magical power with mundane objects has been your forte, and you delight in the creation of new wondrous items and implements to channel your power. Who taught you how to make such items? Is there a particular item you're keen to make, once you gather the rare and expensive materials for it? How do you assess the work of other arcane artisans when you encounter magic items in the treasure troves you find?

Benefit: You can construct your own implements and wondrous items, given proper tools and raw materials. Making an implement takes two days, and making a wondrous item takes four days. Doing so confers no economic advantage, however. The item ultimately costs the same as it would if you'd purchased it directly. And you can cast Creation rituals as if you had the Ritual Caster feat.

Good Background: Wizard.

About the Author

David Noonan is a game designer for Wizards of the Coast, Inc. He contributed to the 4th edition core rules and co-wrote the *Scepter Tower of Spellgard* adventure. He lives in Washington state with his wife and two children.

The Bloodghost Syndicate

by Mike Mearls

illustrations by Stephen Crowe ✦ cartography by Robert Lee

"Once, we were a clan, united by blood and driven to slay and pillage. Today, we are a syndicate, bound by a desire for profit, power, and luxury. You can shriek your prayers to Bane, beat your axe upon your shield, and cleave the skull of the nearest dwarf, but if you do it near my caravan routes, in the region of my cities, or smash the skull of a dwarf who owes me money, then you will have to deal with me. Keep to your tents and caves. The cities of men are mine."

—Rathos Bloodghost, in a letter sent to Mugol Khan, dark crusader of Bane. It is worth noting that the note was affixed to a rapier skewered through the eye socket of Pargalla, dark paladin of Bane, personal champion of Mugol Khan, and the Khan's envoy to the Bloodghost syndicate.

The word "goblin" brings forth images of shrieking goblin warriors descending upon a village in the dead of night, long columns of armored hobgoblins marching in precise formation, and cunning bugbears waiting in ambush along a forest track. The Bloodghost syndicate likes to keep it that way. From their hidden lairs in cities across the world, they engage in extortion, assassination, robbery, and even the occasional legitimate business venture. Spurred on by a combination of boundless greed and shrewd cunning, the Bloodghost syndicate has built an empire of crime beneath the noses of those sworn to defend civilization from goblinoid incursions.

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History

The syndicate traces its humble beginnings to one bugbear, Graala Bloodghost. Graala served as a warrior aboard a pirate galleon under the command of a hobgoblin captain. She and her bugbear kin were shocktroopers and marines, tasked with leading the charge on any boarding action.

Graala worked her way up the ranks, and in time she became a personal bodyguard to her captain. She saw firsthand how the captain turned plundered cargo into cash by dealing with human, tiefling, and dwarf smugglers, fences, and merchants of flexible morality. It fascinated her that the humans would expend so much effort to track down her kin in the wilds, while within their cities lurked bugbears who posed just as much a threat.

Graala's assignment also gave her insight into the fabulous wealth that the captain and his coterie enjoyed, while she and the bugbear marines survived on a few coins from each raid. The hobgoblins never led the charge, and they never risked a mariner's trident through the gut or a swarm of crossbow bolts. The next time she accompanied the captain on a secret rendezvous with a smuggler on the docks of a human city, her bugbear compatriots killed the hobgoblin officers left aboard, waited in ambush for the captain's return, and killed him. Graala then led the survivors ashore and into the city, but not before arranging for the smuggler to collect on a bounty placed on the captain's head. Graala claimed half the share, and with the cash liberated from the ship, she founded the Bloodghost syndicate.

Current Status

Graala founded the syndicate nearly 30 years ago. Today, she still takes an active hand in the syndicate's affairs, but her age and infirmity have pushed her son Rathos to take command.

The syndicate dabbles in a variety of criminal enterprises, from gambling, protection rackets, assassinations, and money lending. The Bloodghosts carved their niche in the underworld through a combination of brute force, cash, and access to monstrous allies outside the city who are eager to do business with forces within the city: Orc mercenaries seeking service with an evil lord, cultists in search of a safe dungeon lair or illegal reagents for their foul rituals, and outlaws (whether monstrous or humanoid) eager to turn the goods and coin plundered from their victims into material comforts and fine goods. After all, a few hundred coins stashed in a chest beneath the ogre chief's bed are worthless unless he can do something with them.

The Bloodghosts found willing allies on both sides of the supply chain. Their emissaries buy luxury goods, usually expensive ales and other liquors, and deliver them to humanoid chieftains at outrageous mark-ups. The humans they deal with inside cities are too intimidated to ask for high prices, while the savage orcs, goblins, and ogres are too ignorant to question the exorbitant prices the Bloodghosts demand.

Life in the City

The Bloodghosts employ a number of criminal schemes to supplement the profits they make in trading goods between human and dwarf merchants and the savage, humanoid tribes that lurk at the edge of civilization.

Loan Sharking: The Bloodghosts invest their profits in short-term loans, using a pair of halfling twin brothers named Murro and Kegan Galliwell as front men. Murro and Kegan approach adventurers who need a few more coins to buy or create a magic item, merchants who need just a few hundred gold to keep their businesses afloat, and others whose desperation and greed can cloud their common sense. The twins have short, blond hair, as well as pale skin and blue eyes. They muddle any negotiations by claiming that any promises or deals struck were made with the other twin, sometimes shaking down the same target twice. The Bloodghosts become involved in loans when words and threats fail to extract payment.

Assassination: Bugbears are good at killing, a talent that the Bloodghosts are more than happy to sell to the highest bidder. To avoid drawing unwanted attention from the city guard, the Bloodghosts work exclusively for humanoid tribes and cults outside the city, targeting adventurers and others who visit the city for a short time. By avoiding long-term residents and other fixtures in the city, the Bloodghosts can use bribes and coercion to ensure that their actions are dismissed as robberies gone bad, the result of a feud or duel, or one of the other dangers of the adventurers' profession.

Urban Banditry: As outsiders in the city, the Bloodghosts are acutely aware of the strict divisions within urban society. The poor, outcasts, and dwellers at society's edges are easy victims of muggings, ambushes, and raids. In particular, adventurers and other explorers make ripe targets. They carry plenty of cash and magic items, and the local constabulary has more pressing issues to deal with than the complaints generated by heavily armed, dangerous, and unpredictable travelers. The Bloodghosts set up ambushes near taverns frequented by explorers, knocking their targets unconscious and carrying off any valuables they find on them. The Bloodghosts take care to avoid murdering their victims, since they know there are certain lines they cannot cross without drawing attention. When they do kill a victim, such as for an assassination, they take care to ensure that the victim is the type whose death fails to draw much attention. They cannot take such measures with random victims of muggings.

NOTABLE PERSONALITIES

The syndicate, as befits an organization bent on murder, profit, and power, is filled with a number of notable villains and criminals.

Rathos Bloodghost: This fat, yet still menacing, bugbear developed a love of the finer things in life as the syndicate's profits ballooned. An inveterate gambler, he has in the past staked debts owed to the syndicate, the lives of potential assassination victims, and even the freedom of a paladin captured in the Bloodghost's hideout on a game of cards. He has yet to lose one of these wagers. Rathos speaks with measured, deliberate tones, and he detests direct, physical confrontation. Why fight when a game of chance, accompanied by a platter of fine cheese and dwarven ale, can bring about an equally decisive result?

If forced to fight, Rathos is a ferocious opponent. His beer belly hides a skilled fighter who uses great strength and speed to overcome his foes. Rathos is a brawler who uses simple wrestling techniques and brute force to pound his enemies into the dirt.

Rathos's Entourage: Rathos keeps a pair of displacer beasts (skirmisher 9, *Monster Manual*, page 70) as pets. In addition, a high priestess of Asmodeus granted him a bearded devil as a guardian. As a free action once per week, Rathos can summon the devil to any square within 5 squares of him. The devil remains and serves him for 1 hour.

Jarmaag Fireseer: This kobold was adopted into the syndicate for his uncanny ability to peer into the future. Several times, his prognostications allowed the syndicate to reap tremendous profits and avoid unwanted entanglements. A powerful wizard, he now seeks to unseat Rathos as head of the organization. He considers the bugbear weak and ineffectual, and gathers freelance thieves, humanoid tribes eager for discounts on fine goods, devils supplied by a cult of Asmodeus, and even a clan of sahuagin lurking in the city's harbor to his side.

Jarmaag's Entourage: Jarmaag is paranoid, as befits his secret plots against the city's most powerful crime lord. His personal bodyguard is Druel Spikefist (dragonborn gladiator, level 10 soldier, *Monster Manual*, page 86). He always travels with Galaria, his supposed concubine but in truth a succubus (level 9 controller, *Monster Manual*, page 67) dispatched by the cult of Asmodeus as a counselor and, unknown to Jarmaag, a spy. Galaria betrays Jarmaag as soon as the situation turns against her in an attempt to worm her way into his enemies' good graces. Druel is a mute who suffered a severe head wound long ago. He grunts and howls like an animal and fights to the death on his master's behalf.

Graala Bloodghost: Though unable to leave bed due to a variety of physical ailments, Graala still maintains a death grip over the syndicate. Rathos might run the day-to-day operations, but she dictates the group's long-term goals. She believes her son is

Rathos Bloodghost **Level 10 Elite Controller**
Medium natural humanoid, bugbear XP 1,000

Initiative +8 **Senses** Perception +12, low-light vision
HP 212; **Bloodied** 106
AC 26; **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 24
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6
Action Points 1

Daggers (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Two attacks; +15 vs. AC; 1d4 + 6 damage.

Flick of the Wrist (minor; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 6/12; +16 vs. AC; 1d4 + 6 damage.

Crushing Grasp (standard; at-will)
+14 vs. Reflex; 1d4 + 6 damage, and the target is grabbed (until escape).

Strangle (standard; at-will)
Grabbed target only; +14 vs. Fortitude; 2d8 + 5 damage. *Miss:* Half damage.

Choke and Throw (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅)
+14 vs. Reflex; 2d4 + 6 damage, and the target slides 3 squares, is knocked prone, and is stunned until the end of Rathos's next turn.

Quick Counter (immediate reaction, when an enemy misses Rathos with a melee attack; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Rathos makes an attack against that enemy; +15 vs. AC; 1d4 + 6 damage.

Predatory Eye (minor; encounter)
Rathos deals an extra 1d6 damage against the next target that he has combat advantage against.

Quick Draw
Rathos can draw a weapon as a free action.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Goblin
Skills Diplomacy +12, Insight +12, Intimidate +14, Perception +12, Stealth +14, Thievery +12
Str 19 (+9) **Dex** 17 (+8) **Wis** 14 (+7)
Con 18 (+9) **Int** 12 (+6) **Cha** 15 (+7)
Equipment hide armor, 12 daggers

Jarmaag Fireseer **Level 8 Artillery**
Small natural humanoid, kobold XP 350

Initiative +5 **Senses** Perception +11
HP 72; **Bloodied** 36
AC 20; **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 21
Speed 6

Dagger (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+13 vs. AC; 1d4 damage.

Black Shard (standard; at-will) ✦ **Implement, Necrotic**
+11 vs. Reflex; 1d6 + 4 necrotic damage, and the target is slowed until the end of Jarmaag's next turn.

Lightning Arc (standard; at-will) ✦ **Implement, Lightning**
Ranged 10, up to 3 targets; +11 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 4 lightning damage.

Wind Burst (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Implement**
Area burst 1 within 10; +11 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 4 damage, and the target slides 2 squares.

Acid Storm (standard; encounter) ✦ **Acid, Implement**
Area burst 2 within 10; +11 vs. Fortitude; 1d10 + 6 acid damage. *Miss:* Half damage.

Knife in the Back
If Jarmaag includes at least one ally in an area attack, he deals an extra 1d6 damage with that attack to all targets.

Shifty (minor; at-will)
Jarmaag shifts 1 square.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Draconic, Goblin
Skills Arcana +14, Diplomacy +12, Insight +11, Perception +11, Stealth +12, Thievery +12
Str 11 (+4) **Dex** 13 (+5) **Wis** 14 (+6)
Con 18 (+8) **Int** 20 (+9) **Cha** 17 (+7)
Equipment robes, dagger, wand

too soft to remain in control and quietly supports the machinations of Jarmaag, his second in command. By her reasoning, if a revolt does not kill Rathos, it could leave him stronger for the experience. If he dies, then Jarmaag was meant to lead.

Graala is too old and withered to fight, thus a stat block for her is pointless. However, she is a canny negotiator and the characters might have to speak with her if they do business with the syndicate. She has a +16 bonus to Bluff, Diplomacy, and Intimidate checks, and a +14 bonus to Insight.

With the proceeds of a lifetime of crime, Graala has made as secure a home as she can afford. She lives in a fortified mansion outside the city. A group of a dozen warforged soldiers (level 4 soldiers, *Monster Manual*, page 261) leads packs of iron defenders in regular patrols of the grounds. The warforged refuse to talk to outsiders, and none of them have ever been in the house. They enter the place only to attack intruders, but thus far no one that they know of has broken into the place. Only Rathos and Jarmaag are given private audiences, and they visit here only by night.

Within the house, three skeletal tomb guardians (level 10 brutes, *Monster Manual*, page 235) and two mezzodemons (level 11 soldiers, *Monster Manual*, page 58) stand guard on the first and second floor. The mezzodemons are bound within a pair of paintings, one in each floor's hallway. When an intruder passes either painting, the two demons appear and attack. The skeletons lurk within curtained alcoves: two on the first floor, one on the second.

Graala rarely receives visitors other than her son. Rumors abound that her mansion also serves as the home of an elderly warlock who went insane over 30 years ago. She was placed in the home by her friends, who were powerful adventurers who also recruited the warforged guards, after a disastrous expedition to the feywild. Magical wards bind her into the mansion. The story claims that she is too dangerous to walk the city, yet her madness was the price of a ritual she conducted to allow her and her friends to escape back home. The few freelance thieves who have tried to enter the place disappeared, lending credence to this tale. Adventurers who break into the mansion in search of the "mad warlock's" treasure might soon find the city's most powerful crime syndicate gunning for their lives.

Tolg Longshanks: Tolg is one of several doppelgangers who work for the syndicate. A petty fence who frequents several taverns by the docks, he scouts adventurers, deals in stolen goods for the Bloodghosts, and keeps an ear out for promising targets. Tolg might strike up a conversation with adventurers under the pretense of hiring them for a mission, usually one that

Tolg Longshank, Doppelganger		**Level 5 Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid (shapechanger)		XP 200
Initiative +6	**Senses** Perception +4	
HP 61; **Bloodied** 30		
AC 19; **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 17		
Speed 6		
Dagger (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**		
Move 2 squares, then attack; +12 vs. AC; 1d4 + 6 damage.		
Thread the Needle (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**		
Ranged 5/10; +15 vs. AC; 1d4 + 2 damage.		
Tumbling Attack (standard; recharge ⚅) ✦ **Weapon**		
Tolg shifts 3 squares before or after an attack; +12 vs. AC; 1d4 + 6 damage.		
Combat Advantage		
Tolg deals an extra 1d6 damage against every target it has combat advantage against.		
Change Shape (minor; at-will) ✦ **Polymorph**		
Tolg can alter his physical form to take on the appearance of any Medium humanoid, including a unique individual (see Change Shape, *Monster Manual*, page 280).		
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Common, Goblin	
Skills Athletics +8, Bluff +12, Insight +4, Stealth +11, Streetwise +10		
Str 12 (+3)	**Dex** 18 (+6)	**Wis** 11 (+2)
Con 13 (+3)	**Int** 13 (+3)	**Cha** 16 (+5)
Equipment leather armor, 4 daggers		

involves finding a criminal who has hidden in the sewers. The "mission" is in truth a trap—an ambush arranged by the Bloodghosts to beat their victims senseless and strip them of everything of value.

Tolg's Ambush: Tolg works with several mercenaries who have dubbed themselves the Press Gang. The gang includes Rolf Oresplitter (dwarf hammer, level 5 soldier, *Monster Manual*, page 97), Zarrag (dragonborn soldier, level 5 solider, *Monster Manual*, page 86), Del Laursten (human mage, level 4 artillery, *Monster Manual*, page 163), and Twelgar (bugbear strangler, level 6 lurker, *Monster Manual*, page 136). Twelgar is Tolg's contact with the syndicate.

Story Ideas

The following story ideas draw on the sample setting and adventure in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. Substitute NPCs and locations from your own campaign if you do not own or use those adventures.

The Compass: Szartharrax and the Skull Kicker kobolds from *Kobold Hall* are recent recruits of Jarmaag's rogue branch of the syndicate. They steal items and sell them to a contact in town. As luck would have it, when the PCs defeat the dragon, they find a strange device that is similar to a compass but lacking a needle, amid the treasure. This item is the *compass of the depths*. When brought into the Underdark, a glowing arrow appears within it that points the way to the drow settlement of Phaervorul, a drow enclave detailed in *P2 Demon Queen's Enclave*. Jarmaag, eager to ally with the drow, turns the might of the syndicate against the PCs to recover it. Not only does he want it back, but he worries that Rathos might learn of his treachery if he somehow learns of the PCs' discovery.

The Feywild Wanderer: Tallwyn Longstrider is a shifter scout and ranger who knows the regions around Nentir Vale better than almost anyone. Rumor has it that he also has memorized the twisting route through the Harken Forest that leads to the Feywild. Unfortunately, Tallwyn is also a drunk and a gambler. He racked up a deep debt to the Bloodghost syndicate and is now in their prison. If the PCs want to free him, and thereby learn how to journey to the Feywild, they must do the gang a favor or perhaps defeat Rathos in a game of chance.

The syndicate employs a number of thugs, cat burglars, and assassins as part of its operations.

Tracking the Item: Amara Azaer, a scion of the tiefling merchant house Azaer, agrees to sell stolen magic items for the Bloodghost syndicate. She does her business in Fallcrest, and the huge profits her sales have generated have placed her on a fast track to rise in the family's ranks. Unfortunately, the next time the PCs buy an item from her it turns out to be stolen from a slain cleric of Kord named Bordos Hammerfall. Bordos's friends, a small group of fighters and rangers, seek to track down the items and return them to his family.

The Kidnapping: Armos Kamroth, a wealthy landowner in Fallcrest, hires the Bloodghosts to kidnap the youngest son of Lord Markelhay, ruler of Fallcrest, and pin the blame on a tribe of lizardfolk who dwell in the nearby Witchlight Fens. Armos hopes that Markelhay's soldiers, or adventurers in his employ, annihilate the otherwise innocent, peaceful tribe. Their lair sits atop a forgotten shrine to Tiamat that Armos (a secret worshiper of the dragon queen) wants to recover and rededicate to his goddess.

The Heist: The Bloodghosts hire a number of agents to provoke a riot in the marketplace to cover up a major heist. The PCs are in town to rest or buy supplies. Perhaps they are in hot pursuit of a hated foe when the riot begins. In any case, the characters spot the robbery in progress, and if they intervene they must deal with the bugbear robbers and the angry, rioting crowd that surrounds them.

Stolen Merchandise: While fighting a band of evil humanoids, the characters uncover several crates of fine foods and ale. The crates are marked with the symbol of a merchant house based in the city. If the PCs return the goods, they learn that the crates were stolen from a warehouse inside the city. The merchants want to know how they ended up in a distant dungeon, which sets the PCs on the Bloodghosts' trail.

The Invasion: The Bloodghosts learn of an orc warlord who plans to invade the city. Unwilling to give up their cushy existence, yet too cautious to blow their cover, the Bloodghosts use messengers and discreet drop offs to tip off the characters to the threat. If the PCs learn the source of the information, the lord of the city considers the very real threat a simple ruse engineered by a goblinoid conspiracy to trick the city into wasting time and resources.

Bloodghost Warriors

The syndicate employs a number of thugs, cat burglars, and assassins as part of its operations. Here are a few sample groupings of the gang's members.

Ambush Party (Level 6, XP 1,150): This grouping represents the typical strike force assembled by the Bloodghosts.

- 2 bugbear stranglers (level 6 lurker; *Monster Manual*, page 136)
- 1 tiefling heretic (level 6 artillery; *Monster Manual*, page 250)
- 2 bugbear warriors (level 5 brute; *Monster Manual*, page 135)

This group likes to fight in close quarters, such as garbage-strewn alleys and the tight quarters of the slum district's sidestreets. The heretic and the warriors emerge from a side street to attack their victims, while the stranglers hide in a building adjacent to the ambush point, just inside a broken window or doorway. As the ambushers attack, the stranglers reach from their hiding place to grab and choke any PC who backs up against the building in which they hide.

If the heretic is bloodied, she uses her *cloak of escape* to teleport atop a nearby building. From this vantage point, she continues to rain spells upon the party.

Should the battle turn against the Bloodghosts, they scatter and run down different alleys. They hope to force the PCs to split up or chase only one of them. Several beggars, paid to watch the gang's escape routes, stand ready to open hidden boltholes for the fleeing attackers. The characters might see a bugbear run around a corner, only to find no sign of their quarry and several drunken, passed-out beggars snoozing amid empty wine bottles and other trash. The beggars take care to hide a crate covering the tunnel to the opposite end of the block that the bugbear leaped through to escape.

Hit Squad (Level 8, XP 1,650): The Bloodghosts dispatch this group to handle incorruptible city administrators, witnesses too willing to tell their story, or troublesome adventurers.

- ✦ 1 bugbear assassin (level 7 elite skirmisher; stats below)
- ✦ 1 doppelganger assassin (level 8 lurker; *Monster Manual,* page 71)
- ✦ 2 bloodghost hunters (level 8 soldier; stats below)

Bugbear Assassin **Level 7 Elite Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid XP 600

Initiative +11 **Senses** Perception +10; low-light vision
HP 168; **Bloodied** 84
AC 23; **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 19
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6
Action Points 1

Longsword (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+12 vs. AC; 2d8 + 4 damage; (crit +1d8).

Crossbow (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+12 vs. AC; 2d8 + 4 damage.

Acid Vial (standard; encounter) ✦ **Acid**
Ranged 5; +10 vs. Reflex; 2d6+4 acid damage, and the target is blinded (save ends).

Combat Advantage
When the assassin has combat advantage, it deals an extra 1d10 damage.

Assassin's Step (move; at-will)
The bugbear assassin shifts 2 squares.

Assassin's Rebuke (immediate reaction, when hit by a melee attack; at-will)
The bugbear assassin shifts 1 square and makes an attack against the attacker; +10 vs. Will; on a hit, remove any marks placed on the assassin by the attacker, and the assassin gains combat advantage against the attacker.

Poison Blade (minor; special) ✦ **Poison**
As a minor action, the assassin can apply one of the following three poisons to its weapons. Once it applies the poison, it gains a secondary attack against the next target it damages with that weapon. The assassin can use only one poison on a weapon at a time. If it applies another poison before damaging an enemy with its first poison, the initial poison is wasted.

Mindfire Poison
Secondary Attack: +10 vs. Will; the target is blinded (save ends).
Ghoul Blood
Secondary Attack: +10 vs. Fortitude; the target is immobilized (save ends).
Scorpion Venom
Secondary Attack: +10 vs. Fortitude; the target takes ongoing 5 damage and is slowed (save ends both).

Predatory Eye (minor; encounter)
The assassin deals an extra 1d6 damage against the next target that he has combat advantage against.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Giant
Skills Bluff +10, Perception +10, Stealth +12, Thievery +12
Str 17 (+6) **Dex** 19 (+7) **Wis** 15 (+5)
Con 20 (+8) **Int** 12 (+4) **Cha** 14 (+5)
Equipment leather armor, longsword, crossbow, 10 bolts, dagger

The hit squad works as two separate teams to take down its prey. The doppelganger shadows the victim or, if it can adopt an appropriate disguise, gets close enough to check on its target's defenses. It then tries one of two ruses. It uses a cover story that preys on the target's known weaknesses to get the person alone. The doppelganger might disguise itself as an attractive member of the opposite sex, or it could propose a business deal that requires private negotiations. In any case, the doppelganger attempts to lure the target to a prearranged ambush point. The Bloodghosts, through a combination of bribes and threats, have set up several booths and private rooms in taverns and inns in town as killing spots. These places are warded with *mistweave curtains* and *thieves' doors* (both described below) and honeycombed with trapdoors and secret passages from which the bugbears can launch their attack.

Tactics

The bugbear assassin applies its *mindfire poison* before the fight begins. If it hits a foe, it then uses a minor action to apply its *ghoul blood* and then an action point to attack again. It hopes to both blind and immobilize its foe, setting the target up for a swift death.

Bugbear Bloodghost Hunter	Level 8 Skirmisher
Medium natural humanoid	XP 350
Initiative +9	**Senses** Perception +6; low-light vision
HP 85; **Bloodied** 42	
AC 22; **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 19	
Speed 7	
(+) **Greataxe** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
+13 vs. AC; 1d12 + 5 damage (1d12 + 17 on critical hit).	
↓ **Slayer's Assault** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Weapon**	
The bloodghost hunter moves 7 squares; +15 vs. AC; 1d12 + 5 damage (crit 1d12 + 17); on a hit or miss, shift 3 squares.	
↓ **Blur of Movement** (move; recharge ⚄ ⚅)	
The bloodghost hunter shifts 3 squares.	
Shadow Ghost (minor; encounter)	
If the bloodghost hunter has cover or concealment, it can make a Stealth check with a +2 bonus to become hidden.	
Predatory Eye (minor; encounter)	
The hunter deals an extra 1d6 damage against the next target that he has combat advantage against.	
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Common
Skills Acrobatics +12, Athletics +12, Intimidate +6, Stealth +14	
Str 16 (+7)	**Dex** 17 (+7) **Wis** 14 (+6)
Con 13 (+5)	**Int** 10 (+4) **Cha** 11 (+4)
Equipment hide armor, greataxe	

Tactics

A bloodghost hunter relies on *slayer's assault* to begin a battle, then uses *blur of movement* to slip past its foes and attack wizards, clerics, and others who are less skilled at melee fighting.

Raiding Party (Level 5, XP 1,000): A Bloodghost raiding party gathers to steal a valuable object or to make a quick strike to rough up troublesome enemies and perhaps steal a few of their items.

- ✦ 3 bugbear shadow walkers (level 5 lurker; stats below)
- ✦ 2 bugbear warriors (level 5 brute; *Monster Manual*, page 135)

Bugbear Shadow Walker	Level 5 Lurker
Medium natural humanoid	XP 200
Initiative +9	**Senses** Perception +3; low-light vision
HP 49; **Bloodied** 24	
AC 19; **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 16	
Speed 7	
Action Points 1	
(+) **Short Sword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
+10 vs. AC; 2d6 + 3 damage.	
↓ **Blur of Movement** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅)	
The shadow walker shifts up to 8 squares, and can make 2 *short sword* attacks at any point during the move. The shadow walker must attack two different targets, and a target slides 3 squares on a hit.	
Shadow Walk • **Illusion**	
The shadow walker turns invisible until the end of its next turn or until it attacks when it moves 3 or more squares on its turn.	
Predatory Eye (minor; encounter)	
The shadow walker deals an extra 1d6 damage against the next target that it has combat advantage against.	
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Common, Goblin
Skills Acrobatics +9, Athletics +9, Stealth +12, Thievery +10	
Str 14 (+4)	**Dex** 17 (+5) **Wis** 12 (+3)
Con 13 (+3)	**Int** 13 (+3) **Cha** 11 (+2)
Equipment leather armor, short sword	

The warriors serve as look-outs and muscle if the group requires a show of force. Otherwise, they stay out of the way while the shadow walkers, adepts skilled in spells drawn from the Shadowfell, sweep in to attack or grab valuables. With their superior speed and ability to become invisible, the shadow walkers can strike and flee without suffering any attacks.

Tactics

The shadow walker uses its superior speed and *shadow walk* ability to evade detection. It strikes, then moves away to turn invisible and prepare for its next attack. It uses its action point if sorely pressed to attack, shift, and move far enough to become invisible.

Tools of the Trade

With access to plenty of cash and spellcasters who are willing to look the other way when dealing with criminals, the Bloodghosts have commissioned a number of unique magic items to aid in their enterprises. Although the typical goblinoid chieftain might seek out magic weapons and armor, the Bloodghosts know that magic objects that allow them to work in peace are far more valuable. The Bloodghosts custom-built these magic devices, making their purchase almost impossible.

Mistweave Curtains: Although these thick drapes look like normal, worn curtains, they are crafted with illusion magic to shield those behind them from observation. When *mistweave curtains* are closed, they produce two magical effects. Creatures on the outside see a normal set of thick curtains. Creatures on the opposite side can see through the curtains, since they become transparent. In addition, the curtains muffle sound that originates from their interior side. Creatures outside the curtains take a –10 penalty to Perception checks against creatures inside of them. The curtains function only when hung and stretched out to their fullest extent.

The Bloodghosts hang these curtain in several taverns and inns in town. Their spies use them to watch for potential victims in secrecy and to meet with business partners. If necessary, a *mistweave curtain* can muffle the sounds of an assassination performed in the middle of a bustling tavern.

Thieves' Door: A *thieves' door* is enchanted to create a portal to a distant spot when it is opened with a specific key. Otherwise, it opens to the room beyond.

When the door is opened with its key, the door creates a portal to a spot up to 100 miles away. Anyone who looks into the door sees the distant location, and the character arrives at that spot through a duplicate of the *thieves' door* at the destination. The doors allow for two-way travel as long as they remain

open, and the same key opens the teleportation effect at both doors. If it is closed and then opened without the proper key, the effect ends.

If the door is opened without the correct key, it allows access to the room beyond. A *thieves' door* cannot function if the door at its destination end is left open. When the door at the far end is opened with its teleportation key, the door at the far end opens and allows teleportation in the opposite direction.

The Bloodghosts use these doors to enter and leave the city without fear of interference from the guard. They also trap victims using them, with the target unwittingly going through a teleporting door to a distant spot far from his bodyguards and other allies. With the door closed behind him, the victim is stranded miles away from aid.

Bloodghost Hideout

The Bloodghosts have a number of hidden lairs secreted throughout the city. One of their more important ones rests within the city's graveyard, just inside of a large crypt. The Bloodghosts bought the crypt with the help of a bribed priest of the Raven Queen, allowing them to set up their lair without fear of unwanted attention.

Crypts: The crypts in this place hold the remains of several of the Bloodghosts' victims. The corpses rest within stone sarcophagi, and each one is buried with a few gold pieces and silver trinkets. The Bloodghosts hope that any thieves who unwittingly break into this place are happy to steal a few pieces of cheap jewelry before leaving. An empty niche has a secret door (DC 25 Perception) while the secret door to the south requires a DC 30 Perception check to find.

Trap Room: The Bloodghosts use this room to capture anyone who seeks them out. An informer paid by the syndicate tips off troublemakers to the secret door hidden in the empty niche. The area marked with a T is a trigger (DC 21 Perception, DC 22 Thievery disarms). When a character steps on it, the secret door to the crypt closes and locks, while the cage in the northwest corner opens to unleash a four gricks (level 7 brutes, *Monster Manual,* page 145). The bugbears in the barracks rush from the secret doors to the south to finish what the gricks start.

Barracks: This chamber serves as a place where the syndicate's hit squads rest before and after assignments. Curtains divide the main chamber from the entrance from the crypt. A large fire pit provides both warmth and a place for the bugbears to cook. Four bugbear warriors (level 5 brutes, *Monster Manual,* page 135) rest here.

The Bloodghosts have a number of hidden lairs secreted throughout the city. One of their more important ones rests within the city's graveyard, just inside of a large crypt.

Sergeant's Room: A bugbear strangler (level 6 lurker, *Monster Manual,* page 136) rests here. He is responsible for organizing the guards and questioning anyone who comes to this place.

Dart Room: If someone avoids the trap room, the bugbears use this chamber as a second line of defense. If an intruder's story proves suspicious, the bugbears ask the person to enter this room and wait for an emissary of the syndicate to arrive. They then close the door, trapping the person, and activate four poison dart wall traps (*Dungeon Master's Guide,* page 89). The traps are set in the wall in each of the sections that has a wall to its right and left. When the trap activates, both doors to this chamber lock (DC 25 Strength or Thievery check to open).

The Pit: The bugbears keep four needlefang drake swarms (level 2 soldiers, *Monster Manual,* page 90) to devour the remains of their victims. The drakes eat every last scrap of a corpse, including its bones, to thwart any attempts to investigate the gang's crimes. Even in the world of D&D, it is difficult to prove a murder without having a body to show.

Torturer: Sometimes the Bloodghosts have to resort to more direct methods to learn information, or they need to enforce a contract with an unwilling business partner. The torturer is an oni night haunter named Kralldar (level 8 elite controller, *Monster Manual,* page 200). He relishes the opportunity to attack any intruders to add them to his current list of "clients."

Cells: If the PCs run afoul of the syndicate, they or their friends might end up here. Two bugbear warriors guard the cells. The locks used to secure the cell doors are high quality (DC 25 Thievery to pick).

Meeting Room and Spy Room: The meeting room found here serves as a convenient place for Rathos to meet with representatives from humanoid tribes and other gangs. The spy room has several peepholes that allow Rathos's guards to watch any meetings in progress, both to ensure they respond quickly if their leader comes under attack and to rush the room and attack visitors at Rathos's command.

A DC 28 Perception check allows a character in the meeting room to spot the peepholes that allow guards in the spy room to watch the place.

Warehouse: The syndicate keeps stolen goods here until they can find a fence or other buyer for

them. Several such chambers are scattered in the gang's lairs across the city. The characters might find a stolen item they seek in this place.

Bar: Rathos, as a lover of the finer things in life, keeps several of his largest hideouts well stocked with expensive wines and ales. He relaxes here with his lieutenants, and he sometimes hosts meetings with trusted or high-ranking members of tribes or gangs in this place. An invitation to drink with Rathos is perhaps the highest sign of respect that the Bloodghosts can extend to both outsiders and rank-and-file gang members.

Gameroom: Rathos loves gambling, and each of the hideouts (such as this one) that have bars also feature finely appointed rooms perfect for card and dice games. Rathos has been known to gamble with powerful individuals who need something from the syndicate. The winner earns one favor from the loser.

Rathos's Room: Rathos maintains several bedchambers in the city. He moves around often both to foil attackers and to keep a close eye on the syndicate's business. This place features a fine bed, expensive furniture, and an armoire well stocked with clothing sized for a bugbear.

About the Author

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Claws of Tyranny

BY BRUCE R. CORDELL AND CHRIS SIMS

illustrations by Sam Wood

A troll is usually a brutish lout, little better than a green-skinned, clawed ogre that can recover from nearly any wound. It seems bred to kill and consume, and its urge to hunt and its appetite for flesh never ends. Worse is the troll predilection for eating humanoid prey—trolls like to play with their food, and humanoids often play rough. Few trolls ever rise above the barbaric troll nature, but those that acquire any sort of actual skill in war are truly frightening monsters.

What if such a war troll chose to conquer rather than ravage? How would it go about subjugating its territory, and what would its base of operations look like? What might it demand from a cowed populace, and how might it use its temporal power? Envisage a small fortress and village controlled by such a monster, with citizens of common races under its brutal rule. Heroes such as the PCs live to end such evil, but how to do so without doing as much harm as good?

This scenario is intended for 11th-level PCs.

Napina and Venduul

Even in the days of the empire, Napina was a remote rural community. Its position on a broad lake in the foothills also made it a prosperous fishing, logging, and mining settlement, with a mix of races to call it home. The village's industries were important and successful enough for it to have a local lord, a nice wall, a keep, and a substantial garrison.

When the empire fell, local nobles were left on their own, unless they had strong allies nearby. Life in Napina still went along normally for a few generations after the fall of Nerath. Just this winter, a warrior from an influential family, one Hargus Mensaline, captain of the militia, got it into his head that he could seize power in the village. Lady Eva Napina, then the ruling noble, refused to acquiesce to the demands of the rebel faction. War ensued.

Mensaline then made a severe error in judgment. He hired a small squad of trolls to aid his rebels. The rebels quickly proved victorious, but the troll leader, a Bane-worshiping war troll named Venduul, cunningly discerned that no one left alive could oppose his rule in Napina. Venduul and his trolls killed Mensaline and Lady Napina, and they took control of Napina soon after. With springtime waxing in Napina, Venduul now has plans to use the village and its fortress to gather an army to conquer nearby lands in Bane's name.

NAPINA

A sizeable village located on the borderlands and ruled by trolls, Napina is a community in need of some help.

Population: 500; another 200 or so live in the countryside and wilds around the village. Most of these have been rounded up and forced into the village proper. The people are mostly human and dwarf, with a smattering of other races.

Government: The war troll Venduul rules Napina.

Defense: Ten trolls defend Napina, and Venduul has replaced typical village guards with subjugated ogres and allied ettins from the nearby mountains. The trolls also have worgs and bears. They can force a muster of 50 militia warriors from among the townsfolk.

Adventure Hooks

Venduul's evil plans might reach the ears of heroes in one of a few ways. Which one you use depends on how much information you want the characters to have at the outset of the adventure.

Nightmares: Sonja Arctur, priestess in a local temple, has had dark nightmares of late. Her dreams show her an army marching out of the forested hills under Bane's foul banner. Confirmation of her portentous visions came in the form of a *sending* from the priest of Napina, Alain Fletcher. Sonja says the message was, "Serving the traitor Hargus Mensaline, trolls have slain Lady Napina, and taken the village and keep. Their war troll leader worships Bane. Please send aid." Sonja petitioned the local baron for help, but he is unwilling to send troops to protect the far-flung village. So the priestess has turned to the heroes for help—at least to discover more information for a possible military strike.

Tales of War: Corkary Merrimar, an injured halfling, stumbled into town a day ago. He hails from a halfling clan that resides in the wilds near Napina. He reports that a civil war recently occurred in the village—a warrior named Hargus Mensaline tried to take power from the rightful noble, Lady Napina. Mensaline involved trolls, including a war troll. Those trolls appeared to have free reign when Corkary fled, for they rousted the halflings and forced most of them into the walled village.

A Merchant's Woes: A few merchants who traveled to Napina from a distant trade town have not returned. Anders Fim, a representative of one of the merchant organizations in the town, hires the characters to investigate the road to Napina, suspecting brigands or worse. Anders knows that travelers on the old trade road leading past Napina are used to the dangers of the wilderness trek. However, more run-ins with monsters than are normal have been reported lately. It has become apparent that monstrous humanoids and other nasty beings are on the move around the village for some reason. Anders doesn't know that trolls have overrun the village, so the PCs have a surprise waiting at Napina's gates.

Investigation

PCs can make Streetwise or History checks to learn more about Napina's current troubles.

DC 16: Napina has always been a prosperous town, due to mining, logging, and fishing. It has had a military force disproportionate to such a small settlement. A noble house that has the same name as the village has ruled in Napina for generations. The current ruler is Lady Eva Napina, although her son Gregor is old enough to rule.

DC 21: Hargus Mensaline III is a noble in all but actual title. The Mensaline family owns a mine and logging operations in Napina. Its line extends from a warlord of Nerath, also Hargus, who might have been knighted had the king not died. The Mensaline family has a reputation for bucking under the authority of Napina's rightful nobility.
Mensaline family members have always had a lot of pull in Napina's military affairs.

Trolls

A successful Nature check can tell PCs more about trolls, as detailed in the Troll entry of the *Monster Manual*.

Venduul

Wilderness Encounters

Venduul's soldiers patrol around Napina, so the party might encounter trolls well before coming within sight of the town walls.

Social Encounter: These trolls are inclined to kill and eat intruders. They're fearless fighters. Perhaps, if severely wounded and successfully intimidated with the threat of fire or acid, one of them might reveal more information about Napina. They can also be fooled into revealing Venduul's name, usually coupled with a threat or the war troll's inevitable campaign of terror and conquest. You can play this by ear, or create a skill challenge to simulate the foregoing options.

Combat Encounter: As noted above, trolls encountered in the wilderness are inclined to kill and eat humanoids they discover wandering the area.

Elite Patrol (Level 13; 4,200 XP): Though a troll himself, Venduul knows that most of its kindred are not usually motivated enough to follow monotonous commands such as patrolling the forest for intruders. Thus many of the war trolls elite forces are commanded by bestial humanoids who possess slightly more self control, if ever just so slightly. The war troll has made contact with a den of ettins in a mountain valley to the west. In return for physical aid, the war troll sends along booty and live captives.

- ✦ 3 trolls (level 9 brute)
- ✦ 1 worg (level 9 brute)
- ✦ 1 ogre warhulk (level 11 elite brute)
- ✦ 1 ettin spirit-talker (level 12 elite controller)

Like most ettins, the spirit-talker that commands this patrol rolls initiative twice, gets two turns during a round, and has a full set of actions (standard, move, minor) on each turn. Its actions rarely vary from the tried-and-true formula of using its first turn to invoke a *curse of shattered bone*, and its second turn to club the cursed target.

The trolls and the ogre warhulk take commands from the ettin, moving into flanking positions and taking other clever combat actions at the ettin's urging. Even if their foes are using fire or acid, the trolls do not retreat when bloodied, as long as the spirit-talker remains in the combat. A troll does flee if bloodied and it takes fire or acid damage once the ettin falls.

The worg fights until bloodied, then it uses its 8 speed to flee. It flees toward Napina, and if it makes it to the city, it provides news that powerful troll foes are nearby.

Entering Napina

From the old trade road, Napina looks like a well-to-do village, with thick stone walls, and fine stone and timber houses. A stout keep overlooks the town, and a tower-flanked gate provides the settlement's main entry point. It might be here that the PCs first learn that something is amiss within the town. At the gate, a small party meets all comers—Tamor the reeve and guards.

Perception (DC 21): Scorch marks and missing stones mar the thick walls of Napina here and there, as if the city has recently withstood an attack.

Tamor the Reeve

Tamor is Venduul's spokesman to the people of Napina. He's afraid that any interference with Venduul can bring dire consequences for Napina's citizens. Furthermore, Tamor's family lives in the castle with Venduul. They are slain if Tamor fails or angers the troll warlord in any way. Thus, Tamor is just too scared to act against Venduul. Rumor in Napina has it that he's getting rich off the misery of his fellow villagers. That's false, but Tamor has turned over dissidents that have come to his attention. Such insurgents end up on display in crow's cages at the keep or in Venduul's stewpot, so Tamor isn't exactly innocent. He is miserable and would throw his lot in with the heroes if he thought they might win. His duplicity makes for a potential point of conflict if the PCs do emerge victorious in Napina—some Napinans might be out for Tamor's blood after the troll threat is removed.

At the Gate

The characters have to talk to Tamor, who is backed up by troll guards and other monsters waiting within the tower's gatehouse. Venduul is arrogant, so he's content to let travelers willingly enter Napina. All entrants must pay tribute to the troll lord, and leaving Napina isn't as easy.

Tamor greets visitors as follows:

An older man dressed in fine clothes emerges from the gates. He says, "Welcome to Napina, travelers. I am Tamor. What brings you to our village? Know that Lord Venduul might consider your petition for entry in return for proper tribute to his greatness." Five scale-clad soldiers with halberds, and with full helms covering their faces, flank the opening in the village wall behind the man.

Tamor

Proper tribute for those of the PCs' apparent wealth is 250 gp or something of equal worth. However, providing tribute is only the first step PCs must take to gain entry if they don't wish to fight or sneak in.

Skill Challenge: Talk Their Way In

Paying the tribute counts as one success in the skill challenge. This challenge is an example of how negotiations with Tamor might go rather than a script you should strictly follow. It's based on the Negotiation sample skill challenge on page 76 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

Setup: After Tamor says his piece, the skill challenge can begin.

Level: 8.

Complexity: 3 (requires 8 successes before 3 failures).

Primary Skills: Bluff, Diplomacy, History, Insight, Intimidate, Nature, Perception.

Perception (DC 21): You notice village folk wending their way toward the keep in the distance, all carrying various valuables. Crow's cages hang near the keep gate—with prisoners or corpses inside. Large, hunched warriors guard the path to the citadel—trolls! It might be a deadly choice to start a fight here, since it could bring the village's monstrous rulers down on you. (Success here doesn't count toward the success of the challenge, but it does open up a History check.)

Insight (DC 21): Tamor's smile appears strained, like he's sorry to see you—sorry for you. The man himself looks ill rested. He glances nervously toward the guards and the doors in the gatehouse wall. You know that Lord Venduul must compel Tamor to this task, which Tamor is sorry to perform. Intimidation won't work on this fellow—he fears Venduul, whom he believes is more dangerous than you. Tamor might believe that you've come to serve Venduul—or since he appears to be an unwilling partner in this evil, you might shrewdly let him know you plan to fight Venduul. (Intimidate checks made against Tamor result in an automatic failure. Bluff might pull you through. Only one Bluff check counts toward success.)

Diplomacy (DC 21): If a PC asks who Venduul is, Tamor hems and haws about him being the lord of Napina. A success at this check causes Tamor to reveal that Venduul is "the great troll warlord of Napina, and smiting fist of Bane." (Success here opens up a Nature check. It can occur only once.)

Nature (DC 16): Trolls don't rule Napina, or they haven't until now. History shows that they don't usually conquer towns—they ravage and despoil. (This success opens a History check. It can occur only once.)

History (DC 21): The trolls of the mountains around here aren't numerous, but they are unusual. While they're vicious brutes, they have a warrior tradition and a respect for the god Bane. They could have learned these ways from any number of sources after Nerath's fall. This Venduul must style himself a conqueror. Maybe he's gathering forces in Napina. Maybe you could pretend to be such potential allies. (This success can lead to a new Bluff check. It can occur only once.)

Bluff (Convince Tamor you come to work for Venduul; DC 23): You begin to convince Tamor that the troll lord might want to see you as potential allies. He doesn't look happy, but he starts to agree. A soldier leans in to speak to the reeve. (This opens a second Perception check and Insight check.)

Bluff (Let Tamor know, without alerting the guards, that you'll oppose Venduul; DC 26): Tamor appears to understand your true purpose here. He cheers up slightly. A soldier leans in to speak to the reeve. (This opens a second Perception check and Insight check.)

Perception (DC 21): When the soldier whispers to Tamor, you catch sight of his yellow-orange skin. He speaks in a gruff voice. Although he speaks in Common, he says a couple words, probably insults, in Goblin. He's reminding Tamor that you should pay tribute and probably be disarmed. These soldiers are hobgoblins. (This doesn't count as a success in the challenge, but it opens another Nature check.)

Nature (DC 16): Sometimes hobgoblins serve as mercenaries to nongoblin lords. It's rare that good-hearted folk resort to such brutal soldiers. Hobgoblins respect strength and military skill. (Intimidate checks made against the soldiers might work, convincing them they'd rather let you pass as potential allies than fight you.)

Insight (DC 21): It's clear Tamor believes you to be strong warriors—perhaps Lord Venduul needs such warriors more than monetary tribute. Or maybe Tamor would like to see you pass through with your weapons, perhaps to oppose Venduul. The soldiers backing Tamor up appear on edge. They eye you sharply, intermittently tightening their grip on their polearms. Although Tamor can't be cowed, these fools might back down. (Intimidate might work as per Nature above.)

Intimidate (DC 23): The soldiers appear to think opposing you would be a bad idea—Venduul might want you as allies after all.

Success: The characters gain passage through the gate without a fight, without having to be disarmed, and perhaps without paying tribute. If the party was particularly successful and convinced Tamor it would oppose Venduul, the reeve might carefully point them to the village inn, Three Pines, to freshen up before going to see Venduul. He then sends them more information about the town, the keep, Gregor Napina, and troll warlord.

Failure: The party has to pay tribute, leave, or fight. If failures outweigh successes, they might have to disarm before entering Napina—or the soldiers at the gate attack.

Combat Encounter: If the diplomatic skill challenge fails and PCs insist on entering even without tribute, it's a fight.

Gate Guardians (Level 12; 3,515 XP): The illusion of Tamor's control collapses as trolls and other monstrous creatures burst into view from behind the gates, screaming for blood.

- ✦ 5 hobgoblin warriors (level 8 minion)
- ✦ 4 trolls (level 9 brute)
- ✦ 1 quickling runner (level 9 skirmisher)
- ✦ 1 oni mage (level 10 elite lurker)
- ✦ Tamor, human lackey (level 7 minion)

Tamor attempts to move clear of combat; he doesn't fight, even to defend himself. Treat the five hobgoblin warrior minions as human lackeys for the purpose of Tamor getting a +2 to his defenses; the hobgoblins have been commanded to see to Tamor's safety.

The hogoblins probably only last the round necessary for the trolls to roll into action, slashing and clawing their way over the party like an unstoppable wave. As with the trolls of the elite forest patrol, these trolls do not flee if they are bloodied by fire or acid because they are under the command of an oni mage.

The oni mage turns invisible before it enters the fray, then positions itself for the best possible usage of *freezing blast* and *lightning storm*; it tries to hit the most PCs and as few of its allies as possible. This oni mage stays in the fight until it has reached 40 or fewer hit points, at which point it flees.

The quickling runner uses *fey shift* to attack the weakest-looking player. It uses its *quick cuts* power to slash in and out of melee, relying on its high AC to dodge opportunity attacks. Once bloodied, the quickling attempts to flee to the center of town to warn Venduul about the invaders at the gate; this is the quickling's primary role here.

If the PCs defeat the guards and spare Tamor, he explains the power Venduul has over him, and pleads with the characters to save his family. He also reveals the existence of the old mine on which the keep is built, and he might know of a secret entrance the PCs could use to gain entrance without using the front door.

Into the Keep

Trolls guard the drawbridge entrance to Napina's keep. Beyond that is an inner courtyard and the gate into the keep proper, which trolls and worgs watch. Venduul's choice troll lackeys and other monsters prowl around the keep, sometimes killing for no reason other than pure nastiness.

Audience with Venduul

Venduul sits in the great hall by day to accept tribute from his subjects and give his despotic edicts. He also judges those who oppose his rule or otherwise break his laws. Venduul keeps the castle in better shape than one might expect for a troll, but he sits on his high chair like a barbarian chief—surrounded by his wealth. (Some of Venduul's treasure here is made up of mundane goods and excess money that can and should be returned to the villagers.)

The hall has a great fireplace, around which Venduul has erected a horrifying execution station. He puts some of those who defy him in crow's cages, but an ogre thug butchers or boils alive all others. Blood spatters the wall and floor here, as a grim reminder. The ogre regularly throws scraps to Venduul's pet bear, Gorm.

The open pit of the old mine shaft the keep was originally built over yawns behind Venduul's throne. See the Great Escape under the combat encounter for more on this gaping hole.

Social Encounter: The PCs can't remove Venduul from power by using words. Still, if they talked their way into the city with diplomacy or tribute, they can come before the troll lord to size him up and gather intelligence on the dangers of the keep. Flattery, lies, and bribes go far. Venduul might buy false oaths of fealty. He could offer macabre mirthful respect to someone bold enough to try to intimidate him—as long as the threats aren't too offensive. If anything, Venduul is confident in his own power. If pressed by clever characters, he reveals that he keeps the rightful lord of Napina prisoner, in case he needs the "whelp" in the future.

You can play this by ear, or create a skill challenge to simulate the foregoing options.

Combat Encounter: PCs who do not wish to deal diplomatically with the strangely intelligent war troll find an opponent more than happy to cross weapons with them. However, a party of five 11th-level PCs might wish to gather a few NPC allies before daring to take on an adversary as potent as Venduul; remind your players of the power Venduul must wield through NPC intermediaries if your players appear to be traipsing unthinkingly to the slaughter.

Court of the War Troll (Level 14; 5,300 XP): Once combat begins, Venduul screams out a horrifying, bloodcurdling battle cry, summoning his court, which in addition to regular trolls includes a dire bear pet, an ogre warhulk slave, and a witch troll confidant.

- ✦ 3 trolls (level 9 brute)
- ✦ Gorm, dire bear (level 11 elite brute)
- ✦ 1 ogre warhulk (level 11 elite brute)
- ✦ 1 troll witch (level 12 controller)
- ✦ Venduul, war troll (level 14 soldier)

The dire bear and ogre warhulk hang back until the troll witch can use her skin-flaying *ravenous teeth* power, then charge forward. The dire bear tries to grab its prey after making a successful claw attack, then crush what it holds. The ogre warhulk (and the trolls for that matter) take their cues from both Venduul and the witch troll. Even if their foes are using fire or acid, the trolls do not retreat when bloodied, as long as either Venduul or the troll witch remains.

The troll witch begins with *ravenous teeth* if she can target three or more foes. Every round she uses her minor power *flesh for eating* against a new foe, signaling to her kin that the specified foe has been magically tenderized for troll teeth. The same effect also opens foes to being controlled by their panic with

fear of teeth—the troll witch directs dominated foes to attack their allies. The troll witch prefers to remain outside melee if possible. However, to help Venduul and the other trolls with her *burnsalve* aura, she must move to within 2 squares of a troll ally who has taken fire or acid damage.

Venduul puts aside all his pretensions of being a ruler when the fight begins. He charges the closest player and uses *sweeping strike* liberally. His greatsword allows him to make opportunity attacks against all foes within 2 squares of him.

The Great Escape: Venduul is a savage fighter, but he's cannier than the average troll. If things appear to be going badly for him, he takes advantage of the old mine shaft he had his servants uncover in this chamber. The mine shaft is a vertical 100-foot (20 square) drop whose bottom is lined with poisoned spikes. An old iron ladder also provides rickety access down one side of the shaft. Any creature falling takes 10d10 damage from the fall, 5d10 damage from the spikes, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends, but the virulence of the poison gives a –2 penalty to each saving throw attempt). Venduul eschews the ladder and leaps, knowing that even if he is reduced to 0 or fewer hit points, he'll stand back up the next round, and flee into the many tunnels that give off the shaft. Foes attempting to follow him can choose to take the slower ladder, or leap after and face the poisoned spikes at bone-breaking velocity.

The mines beneath the keep and town are extensive. In addition to leading to the dungeon where Gregor Napina is kept (see below), other tunnels lead, after many winding ways, to a cave mouth far beyond Napina (PCs might have even gained entry in this fashion, having learned of the entrance from Tamor if they spared his life). If Venduul escapes, he marks the players as his personal enemies. They see him again one day soon.

Troll Witch	**Level 12 Controller**
Large natural humanoid	XP 700
Initiative +8	**Senses** Perception +10
HP 124; **Bloodied** 62; see also *troll healing*	
Regeneration 10 (if the troll witch takes acid or fire damage, regeneration does not function until the end of its next turn)	
AC 25; **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 24	
Speed 7	
(+) **Claw** (standard; at-will)	
Reach 2; +16 vs. AC; 1d10 + 4 damage.	
Flesh For Eating (minor; at-will)	
Ranged 10; +16 vs. Reflex; the target takes 1 point of damage, and any time a troll deals damage from a melee attack against the target for the remainder of the encounter, the target takes an additional 1d6 damage.	
Fear of Teeth (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Charm, Fear**	
Ranged 10; targets an enemy affected by *flesh for eating*; +16 vs. Will; the target is dominated (save ends). A troll witch can dominate only one creature at a time.	
Ravenous Teeth (standard; daily)	
Close blast 5; targets enemies only; +16 vs. Fortitude; 2d8 + 5 damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).	
Burnsalve ✦ **Healing**	
A troll within 2 squares of the troll witch (excluding itself) regenerates normally at the beginning of its turn even if it took fire or acid damage any time since its last turn.	
Troll Healing ✦ **Healing**	
If the troll witch is reduced to 0 hit points by an attack that does not deal acid or fire damage, it rises on its next turn (as a move action) with 10 hit points.	
Alignment Chaotic evil	**Languages** Common, Giant
Skills Endurance +16, Insight +10	
Str 18 (+10)	**Dex** 15 (+8) **Wis** 9 (+5)
Con 20 (+11)	**Int** 12 (+7) **Cha** 18 (+10)

Gregor Napina

In the castle's dungeon (accessible through the mine shaft in Venduul's throne room, or through winding tunnels from an exterior entrance), Gregor Napina languishes under heavy guard. Although young, he is a good man who would do just about anything to protect his citizens from Venduul. If the PCs release Gregor, they can learn secret ways through the keep. Gregor is sure to reward the heroes for liberating Napina, and he might employ them further to take the fight to the remaining trolls and other monsters in the nearby mountains.

Napina's Resistance

For an added twist, you might throw in Valerya Mensaline and her resistance fighters. These rebels against Venduul don't have the strength to oppose the troll regime directly, and they probably have contact points within Napina but a base outside the village. They have a reason to ally with the PCs, but also a reason to betray the characters. Val could provide distractions for the assault on Venduul. However, she might want to finish her father's dirty work by killing Gregor Napina and taking power in the town. Perhaps she doesn't, but the possibility of such treachery is revealed to the PCs for an added bit of paranoia. How Gregor and Valerya get along when Venduul is gone is for you, the DM, to decide.

About the Authors

Chris Sims started out working for small d20 companies in 2003, then landed a freelance editor gig for Wizards RPG R&D. Wizards finally got annoyed enough by his constant applications to hire him as the *Duel Masters* editor in 2005. From there, Chris wheedled his way into RPG R&D as an editor, and finally became a story designer after masterminding a few choice assassinations. His credits include *Monster Manual V*, *Secrets of Sarlona*, *Rules Compendium*, and the *Eberron Survival Guide* (thanks, Logan!).

Bruce R. Cordell is a D&D designer, but during his twelve years in the game industry, he has dabbled in miniatures, board games, collectible card games, d20 games, and more. Bruce has over a sixty listed credits to his name, including the *Expanded Psionics Handbook*, *Libris Mortis*, and *Expedition to Castle Ravenloft*. His body of work also includes three published *Forgotten Realms* novels (*Lady of Poison*, *Darkvision*, and *Stardeep*), with more on the way.

Forgotten Realms

Starting Points in the New Edition

This month's Design & Development column is brought to you by Senior Managing Editor Phil Athans and Designer Bruce Cordell.

Starting Points

Philip Athans: Discussions about a new edition of the Forgotten Realms world began in the late spring of 2005. As the Forgotten Realms novel line editor, I was pulled into the discussions early. I'm not quite sure when the idea of jumping the timeline forward was first proposed, or even who first proposed it, but after spending a couple weeks mulling it over, I was an early and enthusiastic supporter of the idea.

Bruce Cordell: At first glance, the century leap forward is the most shocking part of the new Forgotten Realms setting. It is a jaw-dropping change. But it wasn't a decision made lightly. In fact, it was felt something drastic had to happen in order to breathe new life into a shared world whose well-trampled edges were quickly approaching. Many believed that if something bold wasn't done to expand the canvas, the world would begin to die beneath its own extensive history of novels and game products.

How do you do something like that without reinventing the entire world?

A two-fold plan emerged: A great leap into the future would allow nearly every part of Faerûn to appear fresh to everyone, both new fans and old. No one could be intimately familiar with the previous century's happenings. Every place would have some element of novelty simply because a century can't pass without even the most stable of kingdoms seeing some shift or alteration.

The other part of the plan involved literally bringing completely "new" lands into the Forgotten Realms setting. With Ed Greenwood's help, the real forgotten realm of Abeir returned to Toril, in the midst of a cataclysm of unleashed wild magic.

PA: By the end of June, Bruce Cordell, Richard Baker, and I were assembled as the Forgotten Realms revision team. That summer we participated in a series of long meetings in which we hammered out the Forgotten Realms 4th edition "Revision Guide," a document that would later morph, with the help of a lot more people, into the 4th Edition Forgotten Realms Campaign Guide.

BRC: They were long meetings followed by long writing sessions to create drafts of what we'd just discussed, followed by more meetings. We talked about every realm, great and small, including the cosmology. Indeed, the cosmology we settled on as one that would work best for Forgotten Realms was the cosmology that the D&D core rules itself accepted—excluding the particular deities, of course.

PA: Before we got into the specifics of what the new edition of Forgotten Realms would look like, we wanted to be sure we had a clear shared understanding of what the Forgotten Realms was then, and what we all wanted it to be like. We worked together, and with a number of key people both inside and outside of Wizards of the Coast, we organized our principles for the new edition around nine core ideals.

Forgotten Realms Core Ideals

What is this world? What is it all about? Where should we be taking it?

1. It's exactly what it says it is: a world of ancient realms to explore and discover.

PA: By the summer of 2005, there wasn't a whole lot left of Faerûn to discover. We'd spent the last fifteen years or so detailing just about every nook and cranny of the map, in hundreds of books, game products, short stories, comic books, Dragon articles, and Dungeon adventures. There was hardly a square centimeter on the poster map that wasn't detailed somewhere, and frankly it was getting harder and harder to find room to tell a story. Authors, game designers, and DMs alike were being pushed farther and farther off to the edges. We knew we needed new places to discover, and the ability to refresh the core Forgotten Realms so that even the Dalelands had some surprises in store.

BRC: Even my own first steps in novel fiction showed me how the novels and games were having to move to obscure spots to tell new stories. Darkvision takes place largely in Durpar, a country hardly even on the map. Stardeep was hidden away in a hardly visited eladrin realm behind the Yuirwood forest in Aglarond. Other folks were finding themselves similarly squeezed to the edges—even long-time writers in the Forgotten Realms setting. It was a trend the editors noted first. What do you do when all the ancient realms have already been explored and discovered?

Aside from jumping the timeline enough to be significant and splicing lost worlds back into the core setting, one thing we could do is to change how the very

rules of D&D work. That opportunity was serendipitous, and it was a fantastic chance for us to see all of the Forgotten Realms setting through a completely new lens.

2. It's a thousand stories, all happening at once.

PA: From the novel line point of view, the Forgotten Realms setting has always succeeded because there is no core story. It isn't a world where if you weren't a member of, say, the Fellowship of the Ring, all you were really doing was watching the real heroes. The world has to have room for a 4th level D&D character, or the apprentice mage from the next novel, to save, if not the world, then his or her little part of it and not feel unimportant or left out.

BRC: In a world where Elminster is merely the tip of an epic level legion of NPC good guys, the opportunity for less powerful PCs and less epic stories was small. Certainly, NPC good guys exist all over the Forgotten Realms setting, but few of them should be as capable as the PCs. Because of the very nature of the player characters, they are special, a cut above other folks and even potentially touched by fate to one day take up an epic destiny.

PA: Even as we discussed the various agents of change that would help us introduce new elements for the D&D game into the setting, we knew that just like there shouldn't be one set of heroes, there shouldn't be one single agent of change. Though the Spellplague has had a huge impact on the Forgotten Realms setting, it's not the only thing that's happened in the hundred years between editions. It's not the only explanation for why things work or look different.

BRC: Speaking of the Spellplague, even though I was one of its original proponents, I feel like the concept got far too much promotion, both prior to the release of the Forgotten Realms Campaign Guide, and in the Forgotten Realms Campaign Guide itself. At the time where this 4th edition of the Forgotten Realms setting is set, over ninety years have passed since the Spellplague. Most folks in Faerûn don't give the Year of Blue Fire a second thought or wonder how strange it was that there used to be a goddess of magic. Yes, it was a cataclysmic event in its day, but that day is long past. Many other factors are responsible for changes to the landscape and cosmology—so many that the Spellplague is mostly a memory (except for those places where pockets yet linger).

3. It's a place where your character can be the most important person in the world or die in anonymity.

PA: This was a message that should have been getting out all along, but somewhere along the way—was it the Time of Troubles?—a notion emerged among the readers and players that the Forgotten Realms was a world built for a small group of superheroes and a place to read about their adventures. It didn't have room for more heroes. Wow, did we have to make sure people knew that wasn't the case, and back that up with a world that put a greater emphasis on villains and that asked you to be the hero.

BRC: The new Forgotten Realms setting delivers bad guys in droves: the Shadovar and Thay, of course, but also strange threats out of Abeir, including not only dragon-ruled nations, but even realms recently ruled by primordials! And there's that floating city of ancient creatures that hovers in a perpetual storm over the Sea of Fallen Stars. Just what is the Aboleth Sovereignty up to?

4. It's a fully realized world, full of history and legend.

PA: I think the best example of this is one we used in various presentations in the past. Core D&D will give you the rules for a +1 longsword, but in the Forgotten Realms setting that +1 longsword is the Platinum Tongue of Garthak, fashioned as the parade sword for Garthak Hammerfist, patriarch of the dwarven clan of Hammerfist, one of the ruling houses of ancient Gauntlgrym. Everything in the Forgotten Realms setting has a story.

5. It's a vibrant, ever-changing world that is constantly moving forward.

PA: For years we've been closely watching sales trends of the novels and seeing that, without exception, books that move the world forward, however incrementally, tend to outsell books that go back into the past or that have less or no effect on the greater setting. What we call "Realms-shaking events," like Troy Denning's Return of the Archwizards series or Mel Odom's The Threat from the Sea series, had become the rocky center of the Forgotten Realms novel line. As we talked about resetting the Forgotten Realms world, we knew that what we were really doing was establishing a new starting point, and that the world would evolve and grow from there.

BRC: The Realms-shaking events that drive sales for the novels are a dichotomy and ongoing tension in the game. From the point of view of game setting design, it's hard to write a definitive "Guide to the Forgotten Realms" when you know that a year down the line, three different novel lines will have killed off, altered, or in some other way changed basic features described in that putative "guide."

But as Phil notes, moving forward is fun. Not moving the game world side of things forward with the novels would mean stagnation for the game setting. Everyone wants to feel they are part of the same dynamic world described in The Orc King, Shadowrealm, or Swordmage.

PA: We made sure that at least some of the transition stories were told in novel trilogies. In these novels, the fans can see in detail the development of new or the destruction of old realms (like the establishment of the Kingdom of Many-Arrows or the fall of the city of Luskan in R.A. Salvatore's Transitions series), changes in the pantheon (as in Lisa Smedman's The Lady Penitent series and R.A. Salvatore's The Ghost King), shifts in the halls of power (Paul S. Kemp's The Twilight War series), or the reordering of the cosmos itself (in Thomas M. Reid's The Empyrean Odyssey series).

BRC: Phil has nicely set me up to either ignore a chance to plug myself or dive in. I'm diving in: The Abolethic Sovereignty trilogy explores how the city of Xxiphu came to be stationed over Faerûn and what its presence portends, if strict vigil over its beslimed residents is not kept.

6. It's core D&D "plus."

PA: We started out with the absolute conviction that the Forgotten Realms Campaign Guide would render no part of the core D&D rulebooks obsolete and vice versa. Every D&D race, class, monster, and magic item has its place in the Forgotten Realms world, and we'll give you more, like the swordmage and the genasi. No matter what, the Forgotten Realms setting is a Dungeons & Dragons world.

BRC: Indeed, core D&D and the Forgotten Realms setting have never been closer. A DM can pick up the Forgotten Realms Campaign Guide and use one or two of its nicely contained regions in his own game if he wishes. I think a lot of D&D campaigns will find themselves with genasi PCs, swordmages, and perhaps even spellscarred PCs touched by the fire of wild magic –even those campaigns that do not take place on Toril.

7. It's contemporary fantasy.

PA: Though 3rd Edition D&D went a long way in updating the look and feel of the Forgotten Realms world, we knew we still had a long way to go before it felt truly contemporary. This core ideal informed pervasively. How do we preserve the spirit of the Forgotten Realms setting, while making it look like a 21st century fantasy property–one that would appeal to a contemporary audience? I think the art, the political and philosophical ambiguity, and the sheer scope of the revised setting shows you just how far the Forgotten Realms setting has come from its 1980s roots.

BRC: Here's one example. The great and ever-increasing popularity of eastern fighting styles and eastern myths sees a similarly increased profile in the Forgotten Realms setting. Shou from down the Golden Way have continued to settle in Faerûn, and they have claimed a nation all their own west of the Sea of Fallen Stars that they have named Nathlan. Extraordinary feats of martial proficiency abound in these regions. When the day comes that the monk and related character classes sees the light of day in a future Player's Handbook, you can expect Nathlan, Telflamm, portions of Westgate, and other places similarly Shou-settled to catch fire with possibility.

8. It's 50% all new.

PA: Okay, don't hold us to that 50% figure exactly. I'm not sure there's even a way to measure what percentage of it is new, but that's the core ideal we started with. We knew we wanted big parts of the map to be marked, for all intents and purposes: "Here Be Dragons." This goes back to the first point: If the Forgotten Realms setting is a place for your characters to explore, there better be some stuff you haven't seen before!

BRC: Apparently I'm example boy on this article. Well, here's another: Returned Abeir–an entire content flush with new wonder and conceived by Ed Greenwood's bountiful pen, no less. Other portions of Abeir fell into Toril, too, but they are now part of Faerûn: the dragonborn land of Tymanther and the genasi-ruled badlands of Akanûl.

9. We're not retconning. We're assuming that everything that was, was.

PA: I guess you could call this the "not throwing out the baby or the bathwater" rule. If it happened in a novel or in a game product–any part of the Forgotten Realms canon–it happened. We aren't going to ask you to buy a copy of The Grand History of the Realms then throw it away. Every detail ever published on this massive setting is still there, is still a part of the history of this living, breathing world. We may have a hundred years' worth of distance from it, but it happened, and all that history will continue to inform authors, game designers, players, and DMs as they continue to explore the Forgotten Realms world.

BRC: You know, there might be a couple niggling little details that the 4th edition rules insist upon that we may just ignore. For instance, I doubt you'll see a three-novel epic on how halflings grew, on average, an extra foot.

But barring strange little bits like that, if a story has been told about something to establish it in the previous setting edition, then another story describes how that feature reached its current manifestation in the 4th Edition Forgotten Realms setting–even if we haven't yet told you that story. It's a wide world filled new opportunity. I can't wait for my Elfharrow elf barbarian character to go on his next adventure. When's that going to be, Phil?

PA: The week after we get back from Gen Con Indy!

My Secret Life as a Dungeon Master

Part 2

BY SHELLY MAZZANOBLE

I WOULD LOVE to tell you how my first stint as a Dungeon Masters went, but I can't. You see, I was so good, all my skillz will be revealed in the next *Dungeon Master's Guide*—in a section called "What Not To Do."

Oh all right, I'll give you a preview. Just don't tell R&D.

It started normally enough.

"Let's go kill stuff," Sara said.

"But wait—there's more to the story!"

"I think we got enough to go on," shesaid.

I also remember my nerves getting in the way of how to read monster's stats and what color each Post-It note referred to. I left out important elements to the story, couldn't answer simple questions. Even I was frustrated. Why the pressure? It's not like you can get fired for being a bad DM. Not even at Wizards of the Coast.

For a game that encourages using the imagination, I found it odd my group couldn't pretend they hadn't run this adventure before. Not even my woeful, inventive tale of mistreated dogs could mask it.

"The door on the right is open," Marty said.

"I didn't say that," I countered.

"No," he said. "But it is."

"Maybe in your adventure," I said. "But in mine - " I tear through my notes—"Okay it is unlocked. But it's the *left* side that's open."

"And we see four sets of footprints," he told the group.

"Uh .... *no* Marty Smarty-Pants. Three sets of footprints and *four* sets of *paw prints*."

And all that work I put into my story? Wasted. Even my heartbreaking tale of Shadow Dog—*the sweet, gentle pit bull who was banished from its home. With its spirit crushed and its will beaten, it was sent to the Howl Haven to live in peace. Even after the fall, Shadow Dog's loyalty kept it here to live out a life imprisoned for sins it never committed.*

"Are you crying?" Scott asks.

"No!" I say. "I'm ... in character. There's a lot of history in this room. Perhaps you should pay your respects."

"We're not here for conversation," Scott says. "PilaafDokkurFljot is a red-hot killing machine."

"Have you no regard for what the people of Charlesburg have gone through?"

"Brrr..." Marty overdramatically states. "A draft. Perhaps there's a secret door *by this large pillar.*"

I didn't care that he found the door by metagaming instead of a Perception checkI shoved the party right through the secret door into the lower tomb, where I pointed out two spots on the map.

There are two kennels, each blocking the entrance to a corridor. The room smells like...burnt fur.

Once they got to flex their muscles, they seemed happier. Both Balthazar and Jerika took enough damage to require healing from Pabst–Turducken's mysterious, walking gauze pad - before taking the hobgoblins down.

"Okay, let's move on," I say. "Nothing to see here."

"No treasure?" Scott asks.

If there is treasure I didn't make a note of it in my version of the adventure. "Nope, no treasure. Move on."

"New DM always leaves us treasure," Marty says.

"I am not New DM!" I guess that goes without saying. "But maybe there's treasure in the other room. *Down the next corridor.*"

They roll their eyes like greedy teenagers disappointed by their Christmas presents, but unenthusiastically move on.

"I thought you said you'd rather wear Crocs everyday for a year than DM again,"

We were about to have our first encounter.This should be exciting and empowering, but instead the way I say, "Roll for initiative," sounds like Shaggy commanding Scooby Doo.

The group faced off against hobgoblins who work for Don Tijuana as ticket takers and debt collectors. "Because Balthazar so loudly told everyonethathe knows everything," I say,"the bouncers had no trouble hearing you. They shoot Balthazar with their longbows. Does 21 hit your AC?"

"It does."

"Sorry," I tell him.

"Don't apologize," he says. "It's part of the game."

Then Jerika jumped on the kennels, which set off a trap.

"Oh no! 14 points of damage!" I say. " I'm so sorry."

"Stop apologizing," Scott says. "You're supposed to kill us."

True, true. I don't even know these characters that my co-workers have taken all of 4 minutes to roll up. We'll never meet again. But still I feel like I'm on their side. I want them to kill the bad guys. I want to help them.

You find your way into a cavern. In the distance you hear the mournful sounds of "Awoooo...awoooo...awoooo!"

"Tacos and Peanut Butter!" PilaafDokkurFljot says.

"Paco and Peanut," I say. "Have some respect for the NPCs!"

The dogs are chained inside a magic circle behind a scary door carved to look like Don Tijuana's face. They are visibly scared and feeble. When you approach, their howls grow more urgent and their tails wag furiously.

"Save us!" they call out. "Please! Help us!"

"Them are TALKING DOGS!" Turkducken notes. "COOL!"

"Just like the ones in Shelly's head," Scott notes. "Scary."

What's scary is what 2hours gets you these days. We ran out of time and barely made it through one encounter. Whose job is it to keep the story moving? Oh yeah...right.

As the group filters out with their leftovers, I'm chock full of emotion. Relief, because it's over.And misery, because I apparently suck as a DM.

As I was about to toss the adventure into the recycling bin, New DM said, "So you'll schedule part 2?"

"Only if part 2 is a euphemism for a 'massage' or 'tea party,'" I say.

"At this moment," New DM says, "Don Tijuana is stealing innocent dogs from their cedar-chip filled beds and marching them into the ring where they will be forced to fight to their deaths. You're going to let him get away with that?"

"I have to do this again?" I ask.

"Feel my pain."

When I announced to the group they had to come back, I wasn't the only one surprised by my command performance.

"I thought you said you'd rather wear Crocs everyday for a year than DM again," Marty said.

"I may have said something to that effect in the heat of the moment."

In order to win their favor, I once more promised lunch.

"I'm in," Scott said. "Just don't start crying again."

I didn't cry!

As if rebelling against having to DMagain, I put off my preparations. Two days before the game I dug up the old adventure with my complicated Post-It Note system still stuck to its pages. I shoved it in

my bag with the intention of reading it that night.I didn't. And I didn't read it the next night either. Instead, I put all my energy into the menu. The night before, I stayed up late cooking and baking blue cheese and pear tarts, melon and mozzarella salad, sundried tomato and basil orzo salad, and chocolate cheesecake topped with homemade ganache. It was 1:30 A.M.,and I hadn't even watched *Project Runway* yet!

Yeah, I know. Roll your eyes. But that's a very big faux pas at my job. A significant portion of our 9:00 A.M.team meeting is dedicated to dishing about the previous night's show. If you don't watch, you have to sit there with your hands over your ears or go stand in the hallway. It's shameful.

I intended to getup early to read through the adventure but...well...I watched *Project Runway* instead. I thought I could read it during the team meeting, but there was a big debate over the show. I planned to read it at my desk between 10:00 and 11:00,but I figured if I was going to eat cheesecake in 2 hours I should go to the gym. In the hour I had left before the game I checked my email, returned some phone calls, and eventually made my way to New DM's desk to riffle through his minis collection.

"You ready?" he asked me.

"No, but lunch is."

When the group took their seats at noon, the table was set with cloth napkins and paper plates.

"Roll for initiative," I say with a yawn. I could really use a nap.

"But we're eating," Marty says. "I'll get gorgonzola on my dice!"

"Don't you have some long drawn out, over-detailed story to tell us first?" Scott asks.

"Fine," I say. "Last time, you discovered that Howl Haven was destroyed. You found Paco and Peanut. Then Kritter set off the magic circle trap causing the statues to attack you. Like this."

I imitate the statues.

"They do the *Electric Boogaloo*?" Marty asks.

"Why not?"

The group rolls low for initiative, maybe slowed by the excessive amount of cheese I put in everything, but as the combat rolls into the middle rounds, I realize that mybreakdancing statues are kicking ass. I must be seriously overtired, because I was kind of enjoying this.

"Take that, Little Dragon," I say to Balthazar, who falls prone from a *smashing fist*. Every time he tries to stand up, I crush him with the statues' reaction ability. I'm drunk with power!

"Wee!" I squeal. "5 points of damage."

"I'm attacking the one on the left," Pila says.

"I'm attacking the one ON THE RIGHT," Turkducken says.

"I'm attacking the cheesecake," Sara says. "Go on without me."

The breakdancers take some damage from both Pila and Jerika who crit on their attacks, but they're not even bloodied yet. They get their revenge by flanking Jerika.

"They've got her in a stone sandwich," I say, knowing thethought of being manipulated by a couple of dimwit thugs is going to piss Sara off. "They use *bump and grind* as minor action."

"Balthazar uses *divine challenge* to try and draw one of them off Jerika," says the ever-chivalrous Marty

"The breakdancers thump their chests with their fists and shout, '*You want a piece of me?*'"

"Let's take it outside, punk!" Balthazar responds, rising to the bait. And then I realized that I've seen this side of Marty before. In *real* games. With *real* Dungeon Masters.

In fact, as I look around the table, I've seen this side to all of them. Scouring the *Player's Handbook*, whispering strategy to each other, trying to hide their glowers as they tick of hit points. The random table talk is limited to things like, "Pass the Orzo" or "My stomach hurts."Even I'm not peppering New DM with as many inane questions like "Where's the doorway?" or "How do I mark him?" It's almost like I know what I'm doing.

My breakdancing statues proved to be tough villains, knocking both Jerika and Balthazar dangerously low on hit points. Fortunately, Pabst seems to have an endless supply of healing.

"Excuse me, Miss," he says to Jerika. "Are you hurt?"

"Pabst gets a blue ribbon every time he heals someone," New DM says.

When the break dancers finally bite it, the players celebrate with some high fives and chest thumping. I'm about to burst into tears but not as a result of frustration or animal cruelty. I'm so darn proud. They successfully brought down the villains and had fun doing it.

We move on to the final encounter. I feel the adrenaline burst through my veins because I know Don Tijuana is on the other side of the door, clad in satin robes, cracking his knuckles, and gearing up to kick my friend's asses.

You follow the glow of black light and sounds of thumping bass to thecoliseum. Bleachers are cut into the stone surrounding a deep pit in the middle. Rising 10 feet is a large pillar. When the mist clears you see a large figure glaring down at you.

"If you dare enter this ring, you better be prepared to fight to your death!" Don Tijuna proclaims.

From around the pillar comes four rabid skeletal Devil Dogs. And we're not talking the chocolate kind with cream filling.

"Them ARE FIGHTING words!" Turducken partially shouts.

"You want fighting words?" Don asks, "You came to the right place. Sick 'em!" He starts chucking Kong toys at the party from his perch 10 feet above. That

wasn't part of my original plan, but it works. Kong toys sting.

When it's time for the Devil Dogs' turn, I try to act strategically. I love the thought of knocking Jerika or Balthazar unconscious. I can't get to Pila without causing an oppy, and why bother going after Turducken when his pesky sidekick is probably going to interfere anyway?

Sara asks Marty what he's doing, presumably in *battle*, but he responds with a loud sigh and, "Just waiting patiently for my turn."

"Oh really?" I ask. "Devil Dog 1 lifts his leg and pees on you." I send all four Devil Dogs to attack Balthazar.

"That's an interesting way to mark someone," New DM says.

Pila and Turducken focus their energies on taking down Don, while Jerika and Balthazar fight off the Devil Dogs hellhounds.

Then it was like something from an old Western movie. One sly look in the wrong direction and we were in full-on combat. I'm talking daggers plunging, shields blocking, divinitychallenging.This was a good fight and one Iwas somehow propelling? $Abrupt again. I want more astonishment here. Were you expecting a good fight? Better? The action moved quickly, players acted purposefully, and I even used the DM screen to answer a question about blindness! I wish I had pictures for my mom.

When the first dog falls victim, every thing comes to an abrupt halt.

"What?" I ask. "Aren't we having fun?"

"We killed a dog," Scott says. "You okay with that?"

I hadn't thought about it until now and admittedly, I do feel a bit remorseful. But then I remember I can control the story.

"Congratulations! You have unleashed this dog from it's violent past. It reincarnates into a Golden Retriever and runs off to his forever home."

Cheers erupt from around the table.

More cheering ensues when they take down Don Tijuana. The remaining Devil Dogs are another story. We only had 15 minutes left and I wasn't about to leave unfinished. Dogs needed adopting! If we were going to finish this fight, they needed help.

The Shadow Dog who had monitored the action up to this point enters the ring.

"Avenge me..." he whispers, and kills one of the bloodied Devil Hounds.

"WHAT THE HELL is going on?" Turducken shouts.

"Good doggie!" Pila says.

"Devil Dog #3 becomes a beautiful black lab and makes some family very, very happy."

And it makes everyone happy when the last Devil Dog reincarnates into a Beagle and runs off to find its forever home.

"Paco and Peanut charge out from the disarmed circle and show their gratitude with slobbery kisses!"

"Aww..." Sara says. "Sweet!"

"You loot the coliseum and take all the gold pieces from winnings and ticket sales. You are rich beyond your wildest dreams."

"Perhaps we'll use it to rebuild Howl Haven," Marty suggests.

"You would do that?" I ask.

"After what the people of Charlesburg have gone through," Scott says, "It's the least we can do.

Now I really might cry.

As I clean up the remains of lunch and pack up my borrowed minis I am again chock full of emotion. But not relief. Definitely not misery. It's...euphoria? But how? I'm a horrible Dungeon Master! I don't even like DM'ing. Do I? I mean, I think that was a good game and my players felt challenged and dare I say:I had fun.But how is that possible if I didn't even prepare? I guess one could assume I've played enough to know what makes a good DM. And a quick read through the *Dungeon Master's Guide* provided the tactics. Maybe the old adage is true. Practice does make perfect. Or at least *improvements*.

I brought the leftover cheesecake to R&D to celebrate my victory DM'ing and immediately learned of my rookie mistake.

"The players are supposed to bring the DM food," James Wyatt says. "Not the other way around."

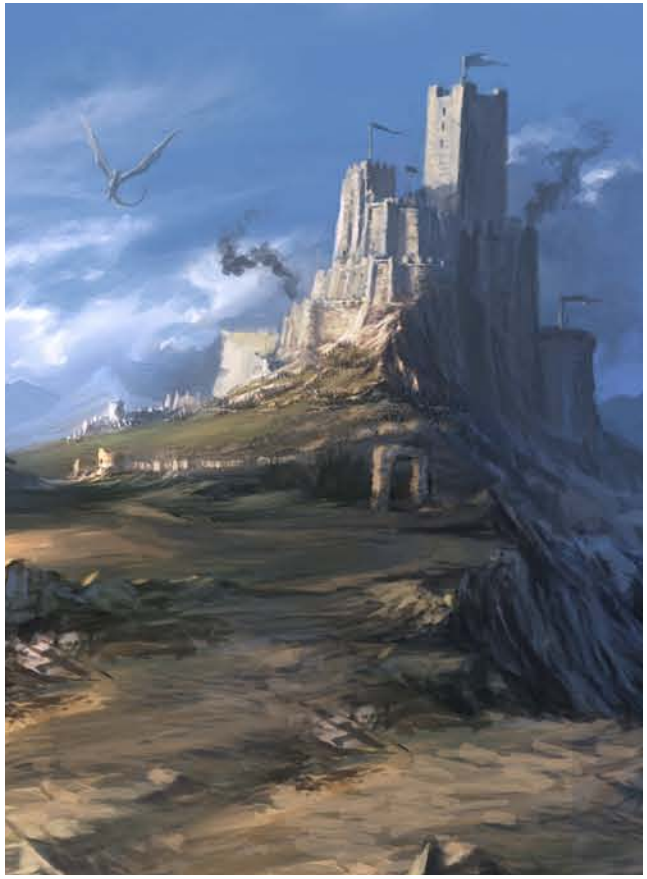
"I guess that's okay," I say. "There's always next time."

About the Author

Shelly Mazzanoble maintains that she never cried while running the game. What happened when she got back to her desk is another story.

Coming Soon to a Game Table Near You...

BY CHRIS TULACH



In this installment, of the RPGA Report, we'll look at what's brewing in the DD Organized Play cauldron here at Wizards over the next few months. So without any more fanfare, here we go!

The first new program we have launches in September and is called D&D Delve Night. It's a monthly dungeoncrawl adventure that is separated into four encounters. Each encounter takes about 1-2 hours to complete.

The encounters are meant to be played one per week, or as often as the organizer and DM agree to run them. Each encounter is displayed on a full-color cardstock sheet with all the information needed to DM the session right on the sheet. Players simply show up with characters of the appropriate level (or create them onsite) and jump right into the action!

As an organizer, this is a great way to have a weekly D&D game without a large time commitment. The session can be played on a weeknight, or you can play a longer session on the weekend using more than one encounter. As a DM, everything you need to run the adventure is on the sheet; just bring some *Dungeon Tiles* and *D&D Miniatures* and you're ready to go. As a player, you can get a weekly game of D&D in without having to worry about scheduling time with a group—simply show up at your play location with the appropriately leveled character (or make one onsite) and you're ready to go.

The first adventure is called "The Tower of Maraj" written by R&D's Rodney Thompson. To be an organizer for D&D Delve Night, you need to be involved in the new Wizards Play Network. If you're interested in participating in the Wizards Play Network, go to www.wizards.com/wpn for more information. If you're just interested in playing, ask your local store or place where public D&D games are held to find out if they're participating. (And if they're not, bug them until they do.)

Alright, let's move on to the second big new thing. As I write this, we are practically on the eve of the official launch of the Living Forgotten Realms (LFR, for short) campaign. There are already hundreds of events that have been set up to play the first few adventures. But we're taking things to another level this fall. On October 24–26, we're holding a worldwide event called ***Weekend in the Realms***. Think of it as a sort of launch party for Living Forgotten Realms and a way to help build your LFR community.

So what's so special about this event? First off, there's an exclusive mega-adventure playable only that weekend written for LFR play. It's called "Beneath Haunted Halls," it's for characters levels 1–4, and it's written by Wizards' own Matt Sernett. Set in and around the famous Haunted Halls of Eveningstar, the adventure is broken into three parts; each part takes approximately 3 hours to play. You can play one, two, or all three parts if you'd like, and earn rewards for your LFR character for each part. Either bring your existing character or create a new one onsite; you'll be able to play all day with just this one adventure.

There's more than just the adventure at Weekend in the Realms. We'll provide DMs with a cool poster map with two of the encounter areas, we'll have a trivia sheet to test your Forgotten Realms knowledge, and we'll have a poll sheet to let the RPGA know what you want to see in Living Forgotten Realms in 2009. All of this stuff is bundled in a kit, which will be available by signing up through the Wizards website at www.wizards.com/rpga. The kit is available in both a print form and an electronic file only form; if you sign up to host an event through the website, you'll most likely receive the printed kit. The big requirement is that you need to host a public event. We want organizers to get their communities together to play at a store, community center, library, or convention.

D&D Experience is the convention to be at to get exclusive sneak peeks of upcoming products, hands-on playtesting of new rules, and face-to-face access with many of the R&D folks that work hard to make your game.

You can also make Weekend in the Realms into a bigger event. Mobilize your RPGA community to help with setting up a convention-style atmosphere, order more adventures to play during the weekend, and get ready for a weekend of fun!

Lastly, for those waiting on the news, D&D Experience 2009 is on next year! D&D Experience is the convention to be at to get exclusive sneak peeks of upcoming products, hands-on playtesting of new rules, and face-to-face access with many of the R&D folks that work hard to make your game. Of course, there's also tons of gaming at D&D Experience, and we'll be offering a host of new Living Forgotten Realms games along with other content to be announced this fall.

That's all I have this time. Tune in next time, when we veer away from news and back to tackling more of what makes the RPGA tick!

About the Author

Originally thought to have been raised from a humble Midwestern family, Chris Tulach actually fell to Earth in a meteorite-shaped capsule flung from a planet far outside our galaxy. While under the yellow rays of Sol, Chris's nerdity far surpasses that of any normal human. Using this precious gift only for good, he has recently become the RPGA Content Manager, responsible for the development and deployment of Dungeons & Dragons organized play programs.

A Busy Month at the Office

by Bill Slavicsek

Wow. There are so many exciting things happening around the Wizards' office that I can't wait to show up every morning. Hey, it's always been a fun and rewarding place to work (and it sure beats some other jobs I might be doing), but right now, at the dawn of the new edition, with so many opportunities swirling around us, the creative energy is just amazing and invigorating!

For example, *Player's Handbook 2* is in the final stages of development and is about to enter editing, and all kinds of new classes, races, and powers are showing up in our games. Mike Mearls, Dave Noonan, and I have worked up a kick-butt outline for the first 4th Edition "super" adventure, and we're about to plunge into the design of that project for release later in 2009. It's a paragon-tier extravaganza that we can't wait to finish so that we can run it for our game groups! Progress on the *D&D Insider* applications improves by leaps and bounds every week, and the various suites of offerings have all of us in the office anxiously awaiting the moment we can share these items with you. Soon, soon.

And if you haven't been reading *Dragon* and *Dungeon Magazines* regularly while they're still available for free, well, then you're missing out on some fantastic D&D 4th Edition content. The new adventure path, for example, is off to a great start, and I just reviewed a bunch of articles that will be appearing over the course of the next couple of weeks. "Trapped," by Matt Sernett, is one that will see a lot of use, and "Wish Upon a Star" promises to get everyone talking—and in a good way! For Halloween, we're got something on tap that will tie past editions to the new edition in a way that just makes the DM in me tingle all over. I'll talk more about that next month.

Plus, we're putting the final touches on our plans for 2010 and 2011, working on new novel series that will become must-reads for every fan of D&D, and experimenting with new formats and brand extensions that, once perfected, will ... oops, almost went too far with that one. Gotta save something for later ...

4th Edition Rolls On

As I write this, it's the two-month anniversary of the launch of the 4th Edition of Dungeons & Dragons. I thought I'd take a moment to tell you how we're doing. The excitement around the new edition is still as strong as it was at the launch, and we anticipate carrying that excitement through Gen Con, PAX, and beyond as new products rolls out and the full scope of the power of the edition becomes evident. From a business perspective, the core rulebooks are already well into their third printing, the H1 and H2 adventures are both in reprint. The new *Dungeon Tiles* product, *DU1 Halls of the Giant Kings* is almost gone from our inventory, less than one month after going on sale. This means that, using the current trends, we're going to crush our original projections for 4th Edition in 2008!

And that's only counting the initial releases! Still to come between now and the end of the year are some key titles, including *Forgotten Realms Campaign Guide, Adventurer's Vault, Martial Power Sourcebook, Draconomicon: Chromatic Dragons*, and *Manual of the Planes*. And we don't stop there. 2009 kicks off with *Open Grave: Secrets of the Undead, Dungeon Delve*, and the highly anticipated *Player's Handbook 2*. From our perspective, 4th Edition D&D is off to a great start. And this is only the beginning ...

GenCon Here We Come!

Next week, my team and I (as well as a whole bunch of other people from WotC) will be at Gen Con to play games, talk to fans, and show off the newest products. I'm putting the finishing touches on a couple of presentations, and everyone is busy making our final preparations for the event. From the D&D Team, look for the following staffers around the show: Me; Scott Rouse (D&D Brand Manager); Sara Girard and Marty Durham (D&D Brand Team); Randy Buhler, Ken Troop, and Didier Monin (*D&D Insider* Digital Development); Andy Collins (D&D R&D Mechanical Design Manager); Chris Perkins (D&D R&D Creative Manager); Rob Heinsoo (D&D R&D Lead Designer); Mike Mearls (D&D R&D Lead Developer); James Wyatt (D&D R&D Lead Writer); Phil Athans (Book Publishing Managing Editor); Chris Young (*D&D Insider* Editor-in-Chief); Rich Baker, Bruce Cordell, Peter Lee, and Chris Sims (D&D R&D Game Designers); Steve Schubert and Peter Schaefer (D&D R&D Game Developers); Jeremy Crawford (D&D R&D Editor); Bart Carroll (D&D Insider Web Manager); and Stacy Longstreet, Keven Smith, and John Schindehette (Art Directors); among others!

We've got a whole slate of activities planned, from RPGA events to two Dungeon Delves (one in the WotC booth and one in the Sagamore Ballroom), to tournaments and seminars galore. If you're attending the show, make sure you stop by and say hi to us. And try to make time to get to one or more of our seminars. That'll be the first place you'll get to hear about what's next for the world's greatest fantasy roleplaying game and all its many expressions. If you can't make it to Indy, come back to *D&D Insider* for regular updates throughout the Best Four Days in Gaming.

Until Indy ... keep playing!

Bill